

Volume II

On the Wings of the Swan

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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Volume II



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Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Satsangs given at Ganga Darshan, Munger,
to Italian, German and Greek groups, in January and February
1992, and during the Sannyasa Training Course,
from 1st October 1992 to 31st March 1993.*



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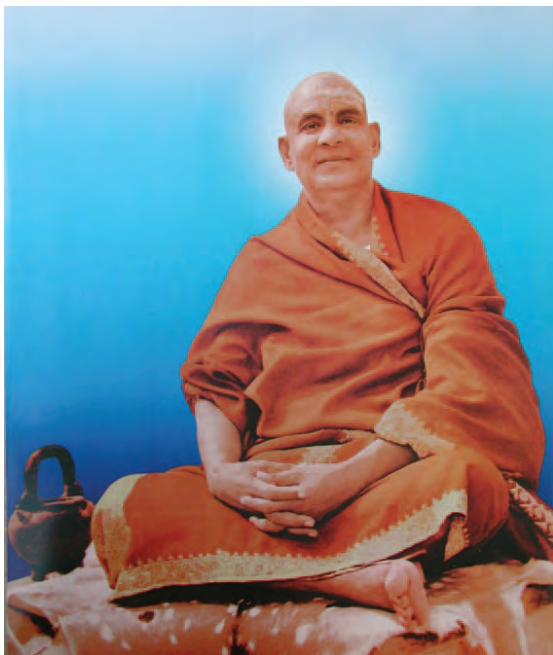
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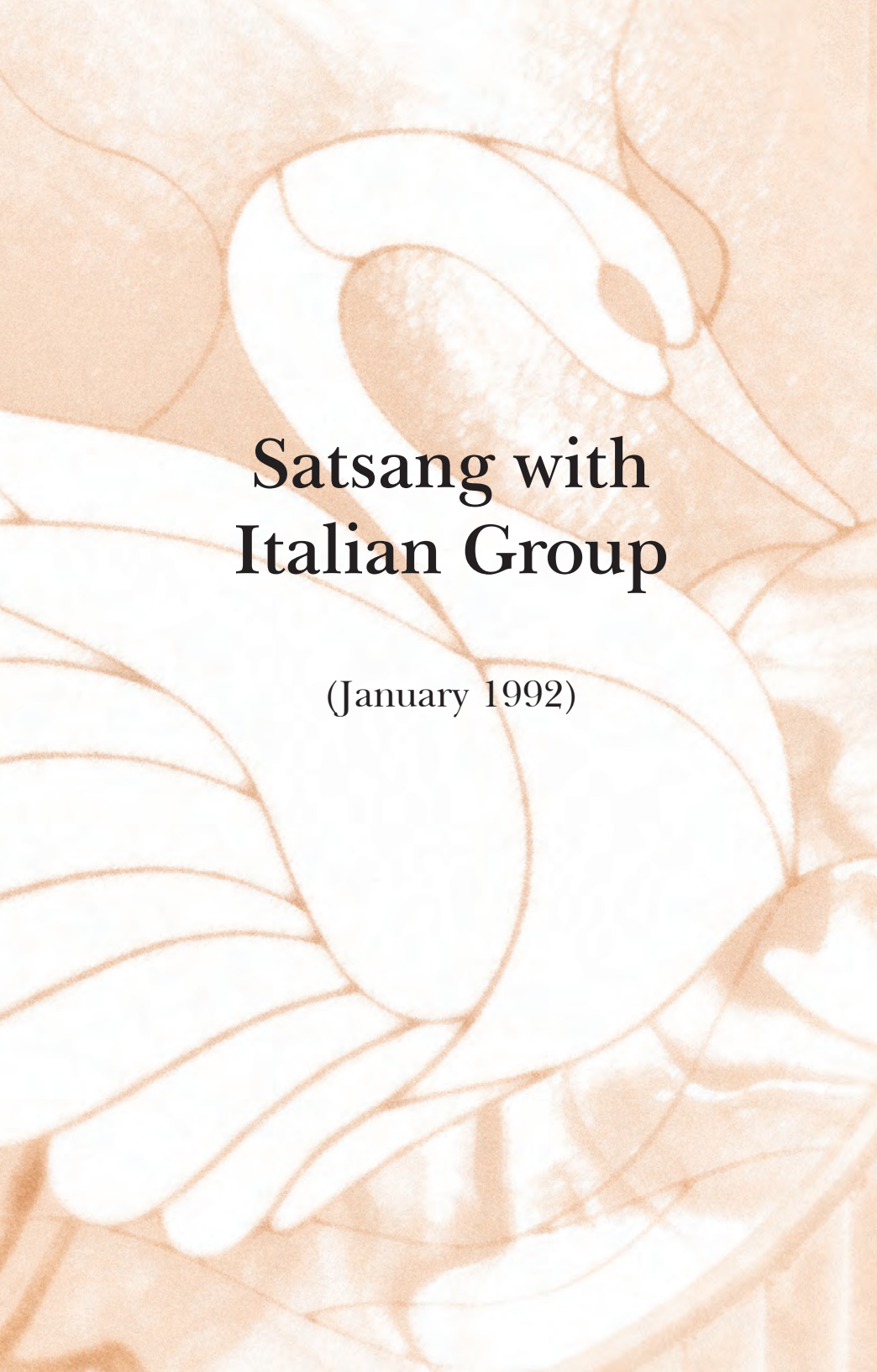


Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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Satsang with Italian Group

(January 1992)



The flame of a burning candle always rises up towards heaven. Understand and see life in the same way as the functioning of a candle.

The candle is the body, the wick is the mind and the flame is consciousness. In this gross body (wax candle), the wick (mind), extends from top to bottom. When the wick is lit by a spark of fire (experiential knowledge), then in the course of time the body dissolves with the bhootas (elements), the identity of the mind is gradually turned to ash, and the flame (effulgent consciousness) manifests and spreads light all around. While spreading this light all around the flame is ever-anxious to extend itself towards heaven (God).

The capabilities of the flame exist in this body. Discover them through sadhana (practice), swadhyaya (self-study), vairagya (dispassion), samarpan (surrender) and yoga. This process will allow your flame to radiate its light.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Please talk about the origin of yoga

To talk about the origin of yoga is as difficult as it is to explain the origin of humankind on this planet. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact, or even the approximate, time when yoga was first perceived as a science by the mind of humanity.

Many civilizations have come and gone and I am sure that each one would have given some thought to its spiritual life. Those thoughts were yogic thoughts because the word yoga can mean different things in different contexts.

First of all, *yoga* means knowledge or wisdom. We can say that when humans first became aware of and gained knowledge about themselves, that was the beginning of yoga.

Knowledge about the body is, in itself, the beginning of self-understanding. Knowledge about the mind is the beginning of self-awareness. Knowledge about a transcendental force which is guiding our destiny and life is the beginning of spiritual realization. Therefore, the first meaning of yoga was self-knowledge.

When humankind realized that a human being is composed of body, mind and spirit, it began to think about how to integrate these various faculties to make a harmonious unit and to awaken the forces, energies and potentials which lie hidden in the body, mind and spirit.

Therefore, the second aspect of yoga became the process of integrating the body, the mind and the spirit.

At this stage, the third understanding about yoga dawned. In order to integrate the various aspects of personality, there must be clarity of mind and concentration. Consequently, the different practices of concentration and meditation were developed in all the various cultures, and yoga became known as a meditative process.

Next came another idea. People began to think, “Is man the creator of his own destiny? If he is not the creator of his destiny, can he in some way guide it or change it, and thus make life an expression of human creativity?” With these ideas in mind, they began to investigate their own dormant natures and discovered the forces of *Purusha*, consciousness, and *Prakriti*, energy, both inside and outside. *Purusha* represents the cognitive force while *Prakriti* represents the manifest force. While realizing the interaction of these two forces, they discovered a process by which they could unite the two. The process through which these two forces could be united was given the name of yoga for, in this sense, yoga meant union between *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, or the union of Shiva and Shakti. We can thus infer that the birth of yoga took place with an understanding of the external manifestation of nature and its internal influence on the human personality.

The system of yoga represents the original spiritual thought of humankind. It represents the original techniques or practices devised to unveil that state of union within. Presently however, there are very few people who understand the process and philosophy of yoga in this context. Yoga being a very vast science, people tend to specialize in one aspect only, just as in medicine you can be a surgeon, a gynaecologist, or a general practitioner and develop your own branch to the maximum.

In the modern-day context, people have predominately adopted the physical practices of yoga as a means to develop the energies of the body. The effects of this physical aspect of

yoga can be felt in the management of various physiological ailments, in harmonizing the functions of the different internal organs and systems, and in balancing the activities of the left and right hemispheres of the brain.

There is another aspect of yoga which is now being recognized as mental yoga. We are becoming aware of the effect of tension and stress in our day-to-day lives, which creates relationship problems, personality problems, emotional problems and social problems, thus disturbing our normal life.

Previously, people thought that meditation was the mental side of yoga, and that for meditation it was necessary to blank out the mind in order to attain peace. However, when we are faced with stress and tension, emotional problems, anxieties and depression, we discover that meditation is a very far-fetched idea. Proper training has to be given to the mind, and the first training is through concentration.

Relaxation, discipline and concentration of mind are the three aspects of meditation. These aspects allow meditation to evolve into something transcendental, where one becomes aware of one's psychic nature. This is the aspect which we will have to recognize in the course of time. People speak about chakras and kundalini; however, the understanding of our psychic nature is very limited, and this is the direction in which yoga is going to evolve in the coming generations.

The birth of yoga was actually due to necessity, and it is based on self-discovery, which has social and global repercussions. Yoga represents the most original thoughts about spirituality, and no date can be fixed to such ideas.

What is the difference and the relationship between yoga and religion?

Yoga predates every kind of religion. Looking at the different religions of the world objectively, we can come to one conclusion: Islam is about 1,400 years old; Christianity is about 2,000 years old and Buddhism, about 2,500 years

old. Prior to each of these religions, people had a different concept of mind, nature and spirituality.

If you look at the different religions, you will see that they have a starting point and a founder. They are organized spiritual thoughts which might be suitable for a group or a nation; for a society or a culture. Certain ritualistic aspects have been integrated into these various organized religions to make them complete; however, after some time they might change.

Yoga believes that there are two types of religion in the world. One is known as *sanatana dharma* or the eternal concept, which represents the original thought on spirituality. This concept talks about the relationship, obligation and duty or *dharma* of every individual. When combined with nature, spirit and the cosmos, it becomes the most integrated form of spirituality.

The other type of religion is the *yuga dharma* or time dharma. This represents religions which change according to social conditions and environment. These religions also change after people have achieved that level of understanding and the fulfilment of that concept.

Yoga does not come within the category of *yuga dharma* if you compare it with religion. It is an aspect of *sanatan dharma*, the eternal obligations of humanity to nature and the universe. It is the *dharma* of the Self. The relationship that yoga has with the various organized structures of thought is very spontaneous and natural, for there is no changing of personal belief in yoga. It is simply an experience of your inner life, whilst following the same principles and leading the same kind of life that you have always lived. It makes one's religion and thoughts more beautiful and rich.

What is the difference between yoga and psychology?

Yoga begins where psychology ends, so there is a very big difference. Our concept of psychology is quite new, maybe 200 years old, since the time of Freud and other people. Therefore, the experiences of psychology are limited when

compared with the yogic experience. There are many aspects of personality and human mind which psychology cannot yet explain. Many ideas about behaviour, personality and the mind are just speculations in psychology, while yoga has definite concepts of the different states of mind.

One example is that modern psychology describes the human mind as conscious, subconscious and unconscious, and nowadays they are beginning to talk about superconsciousness, but in very guarded terms. However, its understanding of even these most basic forms of consciousness is incomplete. It is very hard to define the conscious mind, and equally hard to define the subconscious and unconscious. Yoga has described the concepts in the tantras by stating that there are twenty states of mind, and not four.

How much observation and understanding has gone into describing these twenty states? This is not the work of a speculative mind, but of a mind which has thoroughly understood, or tried to understand, the human personality. Therefore, when it comes to dealing with human nature, a yogi who is knowledgeable, who knows the intricacies of the mind, is a much more efficient psychologist than any modern psychologist. Thus the statement, "Where the concept of psychology ends, the concept of yoga begins!"

You have mentioned a new kind of relationship between the future generations of man and yoga. Can you explain this in a more specific way? In which sense should we understand the term 'evolution' in regards to this topic?

A new relationship is going to develop between yoga and the future generation that will be valid for the next fifteen to twenty years. There are two reasons for this. First, many changes are taking place globally in political, social and economic fields. These changes, which are external, are forcing us now to think about building a better life and future.

It seems that a few years ago our lives were set along a pattern, but suddenly the changes that have taken place

around the world are forcing us to realize that conditions and situations can always change. Whether consciously or unconsciously, similar sentiments are in everybody's mind. This kind of external change is a catalyst for redefining the inner values.

Somehow we knew that changes were imminent when one chapter in the history of the Bihar School of yoga was concluded with the renunciation and departure of Sri Swamiji. For this reason, we closed the ashram for one year with the idea of conducting a sannyasa course. A new generation dedicated to the propagation of yoga needs new tools to work with. What could these instruments be?

Hatha yoga and raja yoga have become very common words now. Even the concepts of kriya and kundalini yoga are well known. Those people who have come into contact with hatha, raja, kriya, kundalini and other yogas have, in one way or another, felt the effect of these practices on their bodies, minds and lifestyles. These changes, which have been provided by the practices of yoga, are valid for the present conditions of society.

Until now, society looked for the means to have better health, and searched for techniques and methods which could help overcome the mental, emotional and psychological imbalances and difficulties, in addition to seeking ways to focus or concentrate the mind. Even if you look objectively and critically at the various trends in today's culture, you will find these demarcations. I am sure that many of you have come to yoga because of health reasons. Very few of you have come with the idea of developing the mind or personality. Even fewer of you have come with the idea of adopting yoga as a lifestyle, and still less have come with the idea of finding a spiritual base for your lives through yoga. The demands of the next generations are going to be different to our demands and this is the second reason as to why they will develop a new kind of relationship with yoga.

We talk about evolution, but evolution of what? If we say 'evolution of consciousness', we are wrong. Consciousness

does not evolve. Consciousness is a field of experience; it is a field where perceptions are recognized. It is the awareness which evolves. When you are on ground level, you can only see a limited distance, but if you go to a higher place you have a wider vision. What has changed? Everything is there as before, but the moment we stop standing on ground level and stand on a chair or go up a mountain or in a plane, our vision changes, and we begin to perceive things differently. Things that seem to be huge from ground level are minuscule when seen from above.

Yoga believes that the awareness of every individual is constantly changing and evolving. In the process of awakening awareness, different experiences and perceptions occur which can become tools for our further growth, or hindrances which stop our growth.

Consciousness is something which has immense and endless possibilities. Right now, our consciousness is centred in our lives. Our personalities and our lives revolve around the awareness, the experiences and the perceptions of consciousness. When blocks in the mental and psychic dimension are encountered, we are forced to think of ways out of those situations. In the next stage of evolution we will be searching for ways to harmonize and integrate the faculties of the mind. Evolution is a constant process of discovery. It is constant growth of human nature and personality.

We have tried to search in the tradition and literature of yoga for ideas and techniques which will be relevant for the coming generations. Ideas which will be relevant for the next two decades have been discovered, and techniques which will be useful for the fulfilment of the requirements of the future generations have also been pinpointed. In one or two years you will see the dissemination of those techniques.

To discover a new technique and modify it to suit our needs is important. One example I can give to illustrate this point is the technique of yoga nidra. The practice of yoga nidra was unknown thirty years ago, and when Sri

Swamiji was studying yoga he tried it on some guinea pigs; I was one of them. When he became sure of its validity and effectiveness, he started propagating it. Today, everybody enjoys yoga nidra more than anything else. However, to bring it to this form took four or five years of experimentation.

Another example is the technique of tattwa shuddhi. It was discovered in one of the texts on yoga that certain techniques existed which help to purify the elements of the body. Those techniques had to be modified to suit present-day conditions and are now in the form of tattwa shuddhi. This practice is a must for the practitioner of kriya and kundalini yoga, because when one practises kriya or kundalini yoga certain changes take place on the level of the tattwas. As the chakras awaken and the energies of the body change, the elements of the body face a state of metamorphosis. If, during this time our body or the elements are impure, the result will be experienced differently. Prior to the development of tattwa shuddhi, a specific technique to balance and purify the tattwas was not known. The theory was known, but the practice was not. Now the practitioners of kriya or kundalini yoga will find that what used to take ten years to achieve can now be managed in two or three.

Certain things have been identified to fulfil future needs. First of all, one should be aware of the natural faculties of the mind which are discovered and awakened with practices that go deep into the human psyche. Imagine that a fire is burning and you throw a handful of red chillies into it. What will the result be? Your eyes will begin to burn, sneezing will start and you will feel very uncomfortable. If you throw other things in the fire which do not give that type of extreme result, you will not feel it, but a different effect will be there. If you throw in butter, the eyes will not burn, but it will have a different effect of purification. This is an example to show how subtle things affect our personality and life, and the identifying and working to develop the qualities of the mind will be an area of yoga for the coming generation. By 'qualities of mind', I do not mean the concepts of

compassion, harmony and love. These are symptoms of an awakened mind, a balanced mind. The quality of mind is a different thing altogether.

The first area of the mind is what we have experienced in our lives, the mind we carry with us everywhere. The second area, which is unexplored and not directly experienced, is commonly termed the extra-sensorial mind. Although a certain effort has been made by scientists to understand this aspect of the mind, the conditions which they created were imposed conditions. There is also a natural way to experience and awaken the extra-sensorial mind. The next generation will have access to that.

Then there is the third area of the mind. By 'mind' I mean totality of consciousness, which is in tune with the cosmic nature. In a very broad sense, cosmic nature is generally spoken of as time, space and object, or past, present and future. We live in the present, but our memories are of the past, and there is no clear vision of the future. This is because we have not evolved our awareness in the realm of consciousness, so as to perceive cosmic time. Perception of cosmic time is similar to the concept of a superhuman being. Do not think that one will become all-powerful after achieving this quality. However, it is a faculty which, when attained, will give a clear understanding of the basic structure of samskaras and karmas.

So far, the techniques of concentration, meditation, kriya or kundalini to which we have been exposed do not provide us with a clear idea of how to pass over these pitfalls of samskaras and karmas. As a consequence, many people have come to believe, and have also written, that one cannot change the karmas; that one is always under their influence, that one cannot free oneself from samskaras. Release from the bondage of karma is generally attributed to the Divine or to a realized master. That is our shortcoming and wrong thinking, because if we come to understand the concept of karma from a cosmic perspective, the idea that one cannot free oneself is very ridiculous.

You are all familiar with Indian roads. Let us imagine they represent karmas. You are driving in a car and there are so many holes and bumps in the road. What do you do? You try to avoid them. In many places you must go very slowly. A journey of a hundred kilometres takes five hours, say from Patna to Munger. Karmas are holes, potholes and bumps along the road of life.

It is our habit to always go above the speed-limit like they do in Rome. When you go at high speed it is very difficult to avoid the bumps, but when we reduce the speed often we have to crawl. That bad piece of road on which it takes five minutes to go very slowly up and down, up and down, can represent five years in a lifetime. That bad piece of road is a bad piece of karma, a hole in which we simply go up and down. It takes one second. In a real-life sense it may take one year or one month. That one second of bump rattles all the bones of the body. It is also very bad for the car's suspension.

Whenever I travel on Indian roads, I really love them because they are the reality of life. They are the karmas and samskaras which we find in every step along the way. One month of a big karmic bump can bring us right down. Five years of that bad piece of karmic stretch will also bring us down. While we are in that situation, we are unable to see what comes after the bad stretch. However, when we have evolved to a stage where we are able to observe the past, present and future, passing through this karmic road is seen as something very transitory, and we never lose hope that the road is going to become better and that the destination will be reached. The third aspect of mind is hence having the knowledge of past, present and future, so as to realize the pitfalls of the karmas and samskaras. There are techniques to raise the mind to those heights from where the ground conditions can be observed.

Next comes the fourth aspect of our nature. After having the understanding of cosmic time, individual karmas and samskaras, there is an interaction between our inner

perception and external life. When this interaction is taking place in a harmonious way, the *gunas* change. Whether one is tamasic or rajasic or sattwic, these *gunas* or qualities of personality will change. They do not really represent the negative or positive natures of personality but more accurately, according to the Samkhya system, the basis for the development of the human personality.

Sattwa guna is normally translated as 'pure and balanced'; however this is incorrect. *Sattwa* is light and *guna* is nature: nature of light. In this context, sattwa guna is the state of being imbibed with understanding, perception, wisdom, knowledge and light. If this is the real meaning of sattwa guna, where did the purity, balance and harmony come in? These are symptoms of a person who is established in the sattwic nature.

Rajo guna too means something different. *Rajas* is a state of dynamism, activity. It is a state of creativity, and if rajas represents the flowering of human creativity to its utmost capacity, then the concept that rajo guna means one who is arrogant, who is full of competition, aggression, etc., also has to change.

In a similar way, tamo guna means something else. *Tamas* means stability, to fix oneself firmly at one point, as opposed to normal definitions, such as lethargy, depression, lack of energy, or a droopy nature.

These *gunas* themselves have been given different names. Sattwa is known as *prakash shilatwa*, which means imbued with light. Rajas is known as *kriya shilatwa*, the flowering of human creativity, and tamas is known as *sthiti shilatwa*, firmly established in a certain state.

Human evolution has to be looked at from many different angles. It should be our effort to maintain the essence and the purity of the practices of yoga. When humanity tried to mix different kinds of food together for taste, it became known as 'junk food'. Now everyone is trying to go natural, wanting brown rice, brown sugar and organic foods. It should be our effort not to allow yoga to become a 'junk science'. We

should maintain the organic and pure nature of yoga because it is the most complete science or method to attain great heights in life. There are very few systems which provide integrated growth in human life. Yoga is one of them.

Generally, I find people lead two kinds of lives. One is the social life. The other is the philosophical life, which is guided by the religious principles of every culture. These two lives are the most predominant lives that we lead. Apart from these two, yoga takes care of our mental life. It likewise takes care of our spiritual life, which is our own inner experience of the awakening within us. It also takes care of life in the koshas. Annamaya kosha is a lifestyle. Pranamaya kosha is a lifestyle, as is manomaya. Yoga covers every aspect of human personality.

What are the koshas? Please describe annamaya kosha.

The human personality is normally understood to be comprised of a physical body along with all its organs and systems. There is a component of emotion, and a component of rationality. Then there is a component of interaction, behaviour and expression; call it creativity. There is also the component of ego. Just as we try to understand the human personality in these terms, yoga has also described it in the form of the five koshas. *Kosha* means sheath or body: physical body, mental body, emotional, spiritual, and so forth.

The first kosha described in yoga is *annamaya kosha*, the body of matter. This body of matter can be animate as well as inanimate. A building, a tree and the physical body are all annamaya kosha. One is immobile and the other is mobile; one is inanimate and the other is animate. The concept of annamaya kosha or the body made of matter is a vast idea.

After annamaya kosha comes *pranamaya kosha*, the body of energy, or stimulus. What makes the body move? It is force, or energy. If you remove that energy from the body what will cause the body to move? If you pick a blade of green grass, after some time it will turn brown and die. What is the force which keeps it green and alive?

Yogis have realized that everything in the universe contains energy, and the general term for that energy is *prana*. The prana which is impregnated in and controls the whole universe is known as *mahaprana*.

The prana which governs individual units like that of a body is sub-divided into five categories. That prana is again divided into five categories, according to the various activities of the individual unit. Animate beings therefore have ten different types of prana within them, while inanimate things have just one. It is the pranic force which maintains and supports a body.

Third is *manomaya kosha*, the rational mind. This manomaya kosha incorporates the various aspects of mind. The conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious; expression, behaviour and relationship, are all aspects of manomaya kosha, as are extreme conditions of mind, such as euphoria, happiness, joy, frustration, depression and anxiety.

Fourth is *vijnanamaya kosha*, the sheath of wisdom, understanding and realization. There are two aspects or levels of vijnanamaya kosha. The first and lower aspect is that of external and internal knowledge, and the second level is the understanding of samskaras and karmas. After one has gone through these two states, the third dimension is achieved: experience, understanding and realization of one's ego.

The fifth kosha is *anandamaya kosha*. This is the body of bliss where the experience of spirit is taking place; where the individual personality has fused with the higher personality. In this way, even the koshas represent an aspect of yogic psychology, as one progresses from annamaya to anandamaya kosha in the course of natural growth.

Some people are stuck in annamaya kosha all their lives. Some are stuck in manomaya kosha. Very few people get stuck in pranamaya kosha because they do not know it exists; however that in itself creates energy problems within the personality. Energy blocks are felt all over the body; in the chakras and kundalini.

Often people think, “I have no control over myself, I am going crazy”, and relate that to an annamaya or a manomaya experience, without identifying that it is pranamaya, for we have not received that kind of training in society. Our social training is to accept annamaya and manomaya; body and mind, and nothing more than that. If somebody gets stuck in vijñanamaya, they have intense ego problems, or difficulties with samskaras and karmas.

In the history of humanity, there have been very few people in the East or West who have risen to anandamaya kosha. They are known as saints or realized souls.

Please talk about annamaya kosha.

The formation of matter and the manifestation of the various elements into the element earth are considered to be the manifestation of annamaya kosha. It is the last manifestation of energy and contains energy in different strengths and quantities.

Matter is of many different kinds, both animate and inanimate. Some forms of matter are totally independent and some are dependent on other matter for their existence. For example, the food that we eat is matter and the body which consumes the food is also composed of matter. Here we find an interaction of matter; one form of matter is consumed to sustain and support the other form. This is known as the dependency of matter on matter. An independent form of matter is stone. You cannot eat stone, and there is no substance received by this form of matter.

Yoga views the whole of creation as the manifestation of matter; the external body is used for the manifestation of creative consciousness and energy. Be it a stone or a body, they have a different composition, but they are all impregnated by energy and consciousness. A stone contains consciousness and energy; however due to the composition of the annamaya kosha of a stone, these are not manifest. Plant life contains consciousness and energy although it is not expressed in the same form that humans express

it. Even different viruses, bacteria and lower insects and animals contain life; however the consciousness and energy within them does not manifest in the same cognitive and perceivable way as it does in us.

Consciousness and energy require different agencies in order to manifest creatively. A stone is simply annamaya kosha; it is just one entity, in plant life we see a combination of annamaya, pranamaya and slight manomaya kosha. In human life we see the combination of all five; therefore, the consciousness inherent in a stone or in plant life utilizes a different means of expression.

It is difficult for the koshas to manifest unless they are in a unit. Annamaya kosha is simply the manifestation of matter regardless of what type of consciousness and energy is contained within it. It is simply a tool, an expression of consciousness and energy in the material or gross world, which provides the experience of the dimension being dealt with in that particular kosha.

Please talk about pranamaya kosha.

The term 'prana' has been related to the life force; however, let us look at it from a macrocosmic viewpoint and then come to a microcosmic viewpoint. In the macro-cosmos the prana which pervades the entire universe is known as the mahaprana, and is the first impulse of life or consciousness.

When one sleeps at night there is no concept of time and space. There is total unconsciousness. When the alarm goes off, there is a slight stirring in the field of consciousness, which then becomes intense, and awareness is brought about. You become aware of the body, the environment and what time it is. In deep sleep, which is a state similar to death, that first movement which takes place in the field of consciousness, which makes one extroverted and creates a link between the body and mind, is the activity of prana. If the link of prana between body and mind is not there, the mind will not coordinate with the body and there will be two separate units functioning; body and mind, in one physical structure.

Often we find that our mind is alert but that there is no control over the body. This happens when we go into deep concentration, or in states of introversion where the link to the external world is lost to the mind. That link is the pranic link which, according to yoga, coordinates the activities of body, mind, rationality, emotions and other aspects of the personality. The mahaprana is that first impulse trying to create a link between matter and consciousness.

Mahaprana is contained in every atom and planetary body. In general terms, it is said to be the pulsation or the life force of the atom of the planetary body. In very physical terms, even the waves which exist in the universe are manifestations of prana – mahaprana. Stars and pulsars which emit different kinds of radio waves, or X-rays or gamma rays are also a form of mahaprana. It simply exists. There is not a manmade wave. This wave or force is created due to the interaction of various other elements. If you started eliminating each wave in the cosmos one by one, eventually there would be just one kind of wave which can be considered as the originating point of all the others. That is mahaprana.

Mahaprana manifests differently in different bodies because it exists on a vibratory level in the psychic body. It also has another level of activity, in the form of stimulation and impulses. People tend to say that the brain is coordinating the physical activity through the agencies of the sensory and motor cortex. The impulses which travel from the body to the brain and from the brain to the body are of physical prana, such as when we get the idea to raise an arm; messages pass via the brain, nerves and muscles to create a physiological response.

To understand the functions of different systems of the body, yoga has divided prana into five major groups. They are the five pranas known as prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana.

Prana is situated in the chest, from the neck down to the rib cage area, and controls the activities of the lungs and heart. This force flows upwards.

Apana is situated in the lower abdominal region. It is the force of expulsion, a downward moving force. It controls the activities of the intestines, the reproductive organs and the glands. Expulsion of waste matter from the body takes place due to the existence of apanic force.

Samana is situated in the region of the navel and means 'proper distribution of energy'. When we consume food, the energy released from it is distributed equally to each and every part of the body. Samana is the dividing line between prana and apana.

Udana means movement, and is responsible for the movement of the arms, legs and head. This prana is the most active, operating for possibly twelve hours of the day.

Vyana means 'that which pervades'. It acts as the reserve force of the pranas, supplying energy, strength or what we know as 'the second wind', when the other forms of prana have exhausted themselves.

The pranas are recuperated at the time of rest because that is the only time when they are permitted to realign themselves.

There are five other forms of prana in the body which are related to different gases and activities of the internal systems. For example, one type of prana is responsible for expulsion of breath through belching or through the anus. Another type tries to bring the body to a state of rest through yawning when the body is in a state of tension or tiredness. Different autonomic activities are controlled by these sub-pranas.

Please explain manomaya kosha.

Manomaya kosha is the mental body or structure which contains every aspect of mental expression. Emotional expression is an aspect of manomaya kosha. What we feel inside: hatred, love, jealousy, compassion, depression or joy, are manifestations of manomaya kosha. These various expressions of mind are related to the samskaras and karmas embedded in vijnanamaya kosha. In order to explain manomaya, I will briefly describe vijnanamaya kosha.

Vijnanamaya kosha is considered to be the storehouse of samskaras and karmas. It is the area where buddhi, chitta and ahamkara manifest in their raw form. When these faculties or impressions have to interact with the external world, they use the agency of the mind or *manas*. Vijnanamaya kosha is like the main transformer, and manomaya kosha is like the wires which are spread all over the building providing light. When one switch is pressed an emotion is manifested, with another switch a feeling is created, with a third a particular behaviour is seen, and with yet another, a certain type of action is observed. These are known as vrittis and have been explained in the *Yoga Sutras*.

There are five main functions of manomaya kosha. The first is perfect cognition, or proof of being or not being. That proof creates a feeling, an emotion, a thought, a desire or an ambition, an action or a type of behaviour. The second is fantasy, followed by conflict, memory and sleep.

Our interaction with positive and negative things, the problems of dealing with our own mind, nature and desires, working with our strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs are the different aspects of manomaya kosha. It is not just the rational mind which is known as the manomaya, but the totality of mind. Therefore, manomaya kosha is a very broad term used to define the various expressions of the mind and human nature.

Please tell us about vijnanamaya kosha.

Before attempting to describe vijnanamaya kosha, I will tell you a story. This story is about the manifestation of the two forces known as Purusha and Prakriti, or Shiva and Shakti, according to the tradition of Samkhya.

Samkhya is a school of thought which evolved at the same time as the tantras and the vedantic systems. Samkhya philosophy provides a detailed explanation of the manifestation of consciousness and energy in the form of Purusha and Prakriti.

There is a universal body of consciousness which is known as Purusha. *Purusha* itself means awareness which is contained within a structure and is in a state of dormancy. That universal consciousness, or Purusha, is considered to be absolutely pure, without any fault or limitation. Alongside Purusha, there is another entity, the universal energy. This universal energy is known as *Prakriti*, or nature, which governs the entire creation. Samkhya has viewed Purusha and Prakriti as the two real forces, the twin forces behind manifest and unmanifest creation.

Something occurred in the state of their separateness, and they came together. When these two forces merged as one, an alteration took place in their natural state of being. This alteration is quite natural; we can understand it even now. For example, the combination of hydrogen and oxygen creates a third substance. In the same way, the union or merging of Purusha and Prakriti created a third thing: their offspring, which are known as the tattwas.

Tattwa is the final manifestation, or the full growth, of an expression of Purusha and Prakriti. In the primary stages, the tattwas were in the form of bhutas. *Bhuta* means spirit. It is very similar to the concept in the Bible which states, “. . . and the spirit moved upon earth . . .” These bhutas are the originating point of the tattwas. Metamorphoses from the level of spirit to the physical level took place. Something subtle became something concrete, and this concrete nature was termed ‘tattwa’.

Tattwa means ‘a defined body’. The primary tattwas are ether or space, air, fire, water and earth. Along with the manifestation of these elements came the nature, quality or perception of these elements. The quality of earth is different from that of water. The quality of water is different from that of fire. Their natures are different, and the way of perceiving the different natures of these elements is known as *tanmatra*. These are the physical manifestations of union between Purusha and Prakriti. Subtle manifestation also took place from this union.

The first subtle manifestation is *mahat* or supreme intelligence. From this aspect of mahat there emerged four sub-aspects. These are recognized as: *ahamkara* or the ego principle; *chitta* or the process of observation; *buddhi* or the process of rationality and understanding; and *manas*, the unit of mind interacting between the gross and subtle dimensions. These sub-aspects make up the body of vijñanamaya kosha.

Vijñanamaya kosha is generally translated as 'body of intelligence', but this is incorrect. Vijnana is a combination or composition of two words, 'jnana' plus 'vi'. *Jnana* means knowledge, and when *vi* is put before jnana it becomes subtle knowledge. The body in which subtle knowledge is experienced is vijñanamaya kosha.

Having already dealt with the manomaya kosha and the manas aspect, I will now explain buddhi, chitta and ahamkara as parts of vijñanamaya kosha.

Buddhi: *Buddhi* means intellect and is subdivided into two groups: one which is related to the external world of objects and senses, and the other which is an internal understanding of the principles which create and shape our personality.

In our daily lives we experience buddhi as something external. We try to understand, observe and analyze things through our rationality. Our actions and behaviour are shaped according to the experiences of rationality. That is the external buddhi or intelligence, but there is another aspect which is rooted in impressions of consciousness not yet manifest. This consciousness which is not manifest contains the experience of past lives, experiences which are carried through the agencies of our parents and grandparents, just like DNA, and contain information from the time of creation until now. The subtle buddhi is influenced by this information in the form of samskaras and karmas. An aspect of realizing the buddhi is therefore gaining knowledge of karmas and samskaras.

Chitta: Then we go into another area of mahat known as chitta. *Chitta* means to observe. Yogis have said that within the personality there is an aspect of consciousness which is

constantly observing everything. Chitta is like the driver of a car, manas is like the steering wheel which takes the car anywhere, and buddhi is like the gears which change the speed. Chitta is the little man sitting within us, observing dispassionately everything that is happening. According to yogic principles, that is the 'seer'.

In the *Yoga Sutras* you might have read in the very first sutras about the seer. Patanjali says that yoga is a way to control the modifications of the mind. Later on he says that, after attaining that control, the seer realizes his own identity. The seer is the aspect of chitta.

Ahamkara: *Ahamkara* is normally translated as ego; however, in order to understand this ego we have to break up the word ahamkara. *Aham* means I, and *akara* means shape or form. Spirit which is lost in self-identity is ahamkara. Spirit which is free from the identity of the self is simply 'aham'. That aham is known as the *atman* or soul. In vijñanamaya kosha we are not dealing with aham but with ahamkara, with the soul which is lost in its self-identity.

When the soul is lost in its own identity, it does not see beyond. We know we have a body; we can see and experience the body. We know we have a mind; we experience it but cannot see it. We know we have a soul, but we can neither experience it nor can we see it. There is a decreasing state of awareness.

When one goes through the process of sadhana into the discovery of vijñanamaya kosha, awareness of body and mind is lost and awareness of the subtle mind takes place, as doe's awareness of the soul.

What is anandamaya kosha?

In anandamaya kosha, which is often translated as the sheath or body of bliss, and happiness of attitude, the concept of soul becomes a living experience. All the impurities and dross simply drop away and the effulgence of the soul is experienced.

The soul is experienced as the governing body of the individual unit of a human life, plant life, animal

life, vegetable life, mineral life, and also of the cosmic dimensions. At that moment, a human being does not remain human any longer. He becomes divine, and that is the realization of the Self, or God.

In your previous talk you mentioned that the ego manifests strongly in vijñanamaya kosha. Can you explain how the ego manifests?

Manifestation of ego in thinking and behaviour takes place in the realm of manomaya kosha; however, let us start with vijñanamaya kosha.

In vijñanamaya, the aspect of ego is divided into two categories. One is just *aham*; the identity or 'I am'. This 'I am', this awareness of 'me' as an individual, and this self-identity or I-identity is not influenced by the other aspects of vijñanamaya. It is only *ahamkara*, or the form of ego related with *prakriti*, which is influenced by situations and experiences. It exists in the realm of *samskaras*, *karmas*, *buddhi* and *chitta* and is a feeling that one is a different being from the source.

When this 'I' uses the faculties of *buddhi* and *chitta* in order to interact with the world, it becomes *ahamkara*. It is the awareness of 'I' which takes the identity of *buddhi* and *chitta*, and when it identifies with *buddhi* and *chitta* it is influenced by the past impressions and memories. These past impressions are subject to time, space and object.

Aham, the pure 'I' awareness, is not subject to these three things. It is like a new-born baby, totally innocent but just having a separate body or identity. From a universal or cosmic environment it has gained the identity of an individual unit. Up to that point everything is fine. With the interaction of *buddhi* and *chitta*, when this 'I' is subject to various influences, the *samskaras* or the *karmas* create a dual tendency, which in yogic terminology is known as *raga-dvesha*. This is also described in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali.

Raga is attraction; *dvesha* is repulsion. These are the first two qualities of the manifest ego. This attraction is later on expanded to feelings of want, desire and ambition. The

aspect of repulsion is understood as hatred, jealousy and dislike. These two aspects of ego, raga and dwesha, attraction and repulsion, create a split in the natural personality. This split is fully influenced by external, social and cultural factors. The pull is so powerful that it is very difficult to take one away from that vortex, and it is also very difficult to objectively analyze or witness it. Therefore, our life oscillates between like and dislike, love and hatred. Depending on the different circumstances, we react differently.

When we are subject to dislike, insecurity develops within us. When we are subject to pleasant, comfortable situations which we like, security develops within us. At that time, the external ego which is manifesting through the manomaya kosha undergoes a transformation. In security, the feeling of grandeur and power creates a very inflated ego. In general terms this is known as the egotistic personality. In insecurity, the same ego manifests differently. Attempting to hold on to various ideas of security, it tends to block itself from other experiences, and then the stupid nature comes to the forefront. This is a one-track mind which does not say anything, which does not recognize anything. It is not a stereo mind, but a mono mind.

These various manifestations of ego can be expanded as much as you like. Ultimately, the effort of practices like yoga or Samkhya or tantra has been to observe this ego in order that we may come to know the influence of raga or attraction and pleasure and repulsion. We can then learn how to manage this ego and experience our pure and untainted divine nature.

Which koshas do not disintegrate with death?

Pranamaya, manomaya, vijñanamaya and anandamaya koshas do not disintegrate with death, as death is a reaction of annamaya kosha. Annamaya kosha is always changing, as we can see from our own lives. We were young before, now we are middle-aged; later on we will become old. With each stage of life, the ability, strength and other qualities of body will change, as the dimension of annamaya is subject to decay.

Pranamaya and the other koshas do not disintegrate because they are beyond the physical dimension of experience. After disintegration of the body or any other matter, the force of the other four koshas unites in spirit, in soul. That soul again merges with the universe and consciousness.

The concept of birth and death is very complicated and I will not go into detail at this point; however, there are two states of experience. The first is known as *ashuddha tattwa*, meaning impure transformed element. Life in the universe is composed of ashuddha tattwas; not impure in the sense of being tainted, but in the sense that they have gone through many changes and metamorphoses. The real essence of the tattwas is never perceived in this visible universe. After the disintegration of the matter composed of the five elements, the other koshas simply tend to merge with their pure counterparts, the shuddha tattwas. These pure tattwas are the first manifestations of Purusha. They are the *bhutas*, the essence or nature of the tattwas.

As manomaya, pranamaya and vijñanamaya merge with their pure counterparts at the time of death, the element of desire remains with the soul. Desire is a truly powerful force. Even God is not without desire because, after all, He also desired to become many from one. It is this desire which drives the evolution of individual consciousness. Depending on the evolution of consciousness, this desire becomes the force which again brings one back to take rebirth, at which point the four koshas find a new annamaya kosha and come back as a body.

Is there a measurable distance between one kosha and another?

Is there a measurable distance between oxygen and blood, or between carbon and blood? Blood contains oxygen; it also contains carbon. Can we separate them? Can we measure the distance between them? No, but through different means we can come to know of their existence. The same thing applies to the tattwas. There is no division; there is no wall between

them. They form one single integrated unit. However, there are methods by which one can become aware of the force of each kosha.

Just imagine if the mind were removed from the body. What would the state of the body and soul be? A state similar to death. If the mind and body remain but the soul is removed, what will the condition be? A state similar to death. If the body is removed from the mind and soul, it is death. In the same way that we cannot differentiate or separate body, mind and spirit from each other, the koshas cannot be separated, but experiences can be felt in the individual koshas.

How does kirtan purify the koshas?

There is one thread which joins all the koshas together and that thread is prana. As well as being a separate body in itself, prana also links the other koshas.

By music, kirtan or mantra, prana is activated, which creates a state in the personality similar to that of standing waves. For example, tie a string to a door or post and hold the other end. Shake the string up and down and you will see that the wave you are creating at one end travels along the string in this form until it reaches the end. In the same way, kirtan, music or mantra influences and alters the state of the pranic body. This change in the pranic body is also experienced in the other four bodies.

Music, kirtan and mantra generally tend to balance the hypoactivity or the hyperactivity of prana. This balance in the pranic structure also tries to create a similar balance in the manomaya, vijñanamaya, anandamaya and annamaya koshas. It is a force which moves through each and every body, and in its wake it attempts to balance the dissipated energies of the various bodies.

Can any kosha be identified by the aura around the body?

The aura is the pranamaya kosha, which is a subjective experience as well as an objective one. When it is subjective,

one feels the movement of prana in the body. That movement is felt in the form of little tingling sensations, or in the form of a current or a high static electrical charge moving through the body. That is a very subjective experience which changes from person to person. This experience is intensified with the practice of pranayama, prana vidya or kundalini yoga.

There are certain people who are more receptive to and aware of different feelings and vibrations generated by others. When a person comes who is highly charged with prana, another person can perceive a type of energy field around the body. Often a colour can also be observed. This idea is generally represented in pictures of saints by a halo around their heads. That halo which we see is not a symptom of their saintliness; rather it is the manifestation of their awakened prana.

What we see in Kirlian photographs is also a manifestation of that pranic force. No matter what the name is, whether it is electromagnetic field or bioenergy, it is a manifestation of prana that is radiating constantly from the body.

The visual experience of prana in Kirlian photography changes according to different moods. When one is tranquil and relaxed, the radiation is greater. If one is depressed, tense or tired, it is less. Colours change according to the health of the body.

What we can see through a machine is also the aura of the body. When we see it through a machine, it is known as the electromagnetic field, but when we see the same thing with our naked eye it is called the aura. That is the pranic field.

To which kosha is the astral body related, and how does it function during wakefulness and sleep?

The astral body is an experience which occurs somewhere between pranamaya kosha and manomaya kosha, because generally the astral body is not bound by any place or space, but is free to move. The movement of the astral body takes place from the dimension of pranamaya kosha; however,

there is also a link with manomaya kosha, due to the aspect of awareness.

Usually, in the astral body, one is aware of desires or wishes, for example, “I would like to travel to such and such a place.” The prana is then sent out along with the manas aspect, with prana and manas travelling together. Therefore, the astral body is the meeting point of the pranamaya and manomaya koshas. It is the conscious experience of that meeting point which provides the understanding of the astral body.

At the time of sleep, the two faculties which are inherent in the astral body simply merge with their parent bodies, which are prana and manas. In order to awaken the force of the astral body, one needs to be sensitive to that union. Sometimes that sensitivity is a conscious effort, and sometimes it is a spontaneous achievement, without one realizing that one has gone into the astral dimension. The sensitive mind is able to direct its energies to the astral dimension, and when the mind is again brought back to its natural limitations, the astral awareness is lost.

Please explain the causal body.

Similar to the astral body, the causal body is the experience of the area between manomaya and vijnanamaya koshas. It is an area where the samskaras and karmas, and the light of the Self are experienced by the mind.

Many people believe that the causal body is the ultimate body, because there they can glimpse the Self. Remember, however, if you have the vision of the Self, yet come back to the normal dimension, with the normal frame of mind, problems, difficulties and idiosyncrasies, that vision is not real; it is only a visual experience. It is the experience of the mind seeing it, but not being transformed by it.

Generally, we are stuck in our causal bodies. We have abundant good experiences at different times; we see colours, angels, heaven and the Self. However, to build up the same experience again, consciously, is not possible for us

as many barriers come up in the causal body in the form of samskaras and karmas. These samskaras and karmas, which are also known as *pratyayas*, bring the mind back to its gross nature. It is like an invisible boundary beyond which one cannot go with the normal mind. In order to go beyond, you have to be either abnormal or super-normal; only then is it possible to go beyond the causal body into vijñanamaya and anandamaya koshas.

Vijñanamaya kosha is the seat of the unmanifest experience of buddhi, chitta and ahamkara, and manomaya is the manifest aspect of vijñanamaya. The causal body, which is situated in between these two koshas, is hence known as the body of cause and effect.

The samskaras, karmas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara are the cause of different experiences within the personality. Before their manifestation, what is relevant is transferred to the causal body, and from there it is transferred to manomaya kosha, according to priority.

Every human being is subject to the influence of circumstances, events and people, and our interaction with, and response to, them is the result of experiences which have passed through the causal body. Our reactions, actions and interactions create a result, and that result or experience is again transferred to the causal body and into vijñanamaya kosha, thus creating further samskaras.

Please explain the nadis and how the practices of yoga and meditation influence them.

The word *nadi* literally means ‘flow’. There are many people who connect the meaning of the nadis with the nerves of the body; however traditionally, nadi refers to the flow of the pranic current in pranamaya kosha. The current of prana which travels from pranamaya kosha to the physical body always travels in a predefined way. When the pranic energy travels into the body through the channels of the nadis, it is in the form of currents. These currents of pranic energy can be experienced in the body in the form of light; tiny

electrical currents, prickly or itchy sensations within the body's physical framework.

There are many layers of nerves and nadis in the physical body. The first layer is the blood vessels, which carry blood from one body part to another. Second are the nerves which carry sensations from the body to the brain and brain to body. These are known as the sensory and motor nerves. The third layer connects the prana from pranamaya kosha with the physical body.

According to yoga tradition, there are 72,000 currents of energy in the body and these energy currents are the nadis. They are the path through which prana is infused into the mental and psychic structure. The prana which flows in these different nadis sometimes stops flowing due to impurities which manifest in the path. This is the point at which one has to understand yogic anatomy, because yogic anatomy and physiology is slightly different from the modern concept of physiology, which describes the body mainly in terms of the structure of muscles, tissues, bones and nerves. The yoga system also describes it in this way, but with a slight difference.

Yoga says that each atom and molecule of the body is connected with a non-physical energy or prana. This non-physical entity, which is the pranic field, also takes care of the cells in the body. The flow of prana in the physical body is also responsible for the proper functioning of the endocrine systems and of the total personality.

If there is an imbalance in the glandular system, the flow of prana in the physical nadis will be affected. If there is an imbalance in the circulatory system, or clotting of the blood due to too much cholesterol, then again prana will be obstructed. Even if there is fatigue in the muscles or nerves, prana will be obstructed. Consequently, due to the obstruction of prana, the pain or imbalance will increase. If one suffers from constipation, the same thing will happen. The performance of the physical body is aligned with the activity of prana in the physical structure.

I am describing prana and the nadis in physical terms; however when we go deeper, we come to the atomic level of the body. Even in the atomic dimension, in the realm of atoms, protons, neutrons and electrons which are contained within the body, their movement and energy is due to the pranic field.

Five thousand years ago, there was a saint in India who was named Kanaada. He was the first person to write down the atomic principles and to describe the theory in similar terms to those of Einstein. Kanaada's theory is still available in the form of Vaisheshika, which has become part of the six systems of Indian thought and describes how prana interacts within the pranic structure. According to Kanaada, the nucleus of the atom, which is pulsating with energy, is prana in its pure form. That prana is the source of movement, the source of life, and that life is visible in our external physical structure.

Psychically, there is also a pranic link. This can be understood through the theory of the chakras. Chakras are fed with pranic energy from pranamaya kosha, and each chakra becomes a centre of pranic manifestation. The chakras are connected to each other through the means of the nadis. Out of the 72,000 nadis which connect the pranic body with the psychic body, ten are considered to be important. These ten nadis are located in the region of the spinal cord. Out of these ten, four are considered to be the most important, although the fourth is not commonly known. We generally say that three nadis are important: Ida, pingala and sushumna. However, within the sushumna nadi there lays another nadi which is known as the brahma nadi. These four nadis are important in kundalini yoga and they are purely non-physical channels of energy.

With the practice of asana, as we harmonize our physical structure and as blocks are removed, prana begins to flow unhampered in the physical body. The practices of pranayama purify and balance the subtle manifestation of prana in the physical body. Simultaneously, they activate the pranic energy in our system, thus bringing about a balance

in the functioning of body and mind. The practices of pratyahara and dharana are designed specifically to purify the nadis of the psychic body through concentration and visualization.

When we concentrate, the faculties of the mind become one-pointed, and when there are less mental distractions our psychic, astral and pranic bodies come into a state of harmony and union with each other. Visualization enhances awareness of pranic movement in the physical and subtle bodies. The subtle experiences are further intensified with the practices of mudra, bandha and shatkarma.

There is a practice known as *prana vidya*, which is generally described as the pranic healing technique of yoga. This practice enhances the ability of the five physical pranas. These pranas are first experienced as electrical currents within the body. The sensitivity of prana is then directed outwards, and along with the prana which is contained in the body, it is made to flow out into the atmosphere and into another person's body.

According to the theory of prana, each human being is like a battery. When you open up a battery, what do you find inside? You see carbon, you see salt, and you see the covering. When the positive and negative poles are somehow joined together, electricity is produced. You will not find electricity if you open up a battery. In the same way, if you open up a body, you will not find the nadis or the chakras. If you are somehow able to connect the poles of your inner being, then that current will manifest in the same way as electricity.

The practices of raja yoga, hatha yoga and kundalini yoga are the three methods through which prana is awakened and experienced.

Besides ida, pingala and sushumna nadis, which are the other main nadis and their functions?

There are ten main nadis. Out of these, six simply connect one chakra with another and are connected with the physical

pranas. Prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana flow through the various chakras in five of these nadis. The sixth nadi connects the chakras together. It is the conductor of excessive pranic force from one chakra to another.

Ida and pingala represent the mental pranic field and the vital, physical pranic field of prana respectively. Ida is represented as *chitta shakti* or the lunar force, and pingala is represented as *prana shakti* or the vital force. Ida coordinates the activities of prana in the mental body and pingala coordinates the activities of prana in the physical body. These two nadis start from mooladhara and come up to ajna. As they rise, they cross over in a zigzag pattern at the point of every chakra. These are the only two nadis to do this, as other nadis simply go straight up. From ajna, ida and pingala continue to sahasrara as one joint force.

So far, we have covered eight nadis. Five represent the five pranas, with a sixth one connecting each chakra and transmitting their excessive prana into the ether, thus balancing the chakras. Then come ida and pingala, crossing each other at the chakra points, representing the mental force and the vital force. The ninth is sushumna nadi.

Sushumna nadi flows when ida and pingala are in harmony with each other. Generally, the flow of one nadi becomes more intense and powerful, and while that is strong the flow in the other nadi becomes weak. The period of their strength and weakness is approximately forty minutes. This can be experienced by observing which nostril is flowing.

On a physical level, ida and pingala are related with physical parasympathetic and sympathetic activity which control the states of passivity and activity. When the mental force, *chitta shakti*, and the vital force, *prana shakti*, are balanced then sushumna flows. The merger of these two energies is the flow of sushumna, but the awakening of kundalini takes place when brahma nadi, which lies within sushumna, becomes active.

Sushumna represents the balancing of ida and pingala, which can take years before the actual awakening of

kundalini, and brahma nadi represents that upward movement of kundalini through the chakras.

How do the nadis affect the nervous system?

Science has not been able to describe it yet, and neither has yoga. Science cannot even decide how the nervous system functions. There are theories of sympathetic and parasympathetic systems and their connection with the nerve plexuses and brain, but how they are linked with the pranic energies is not known.

It can be said that any change taking place in the pranic field will somehow affect the physical condition, because the pranic currents are actually impulses of pranic energy. An optic fibre does not carry a continuous stream of impulses; they come in bursts which are so fast that it seems like a continuous flow to the naked eye, when actually it is not. In the same way, prana also flows through the nadis at a very great speed. As this force passes through the muscular and nervous systems, the stimulation of prana activates them. When the flow is slowed down, the strength of movement reduces and the body has to compensate for that reduction of pranic movement. After some time, the body uses its reserves. If the reserves are depleted then tiredness, tension, stress or pain are experienced.

Many people who have high parasympathetic activity, and whose external behaviour is also affected by this activity, feel well and normal after practising some mudra and bandha or pranayama. This is possibly because of the influence of pranic energy which removes the tiredness and induces sympathetic activity. It is not just that with the practice of pranayama the oxygen level increases, as it has been seen that with normal practices such as nadi shodhana, ujjayi or bhramari the oxygen level does not increase. It is just the feeling of wellbeing, which comes after prana has been infused into the system, which gives one a sense of lightness and clarity.

Prana and nadis have to be viewed and understood from a non-physical viewpoint. If we try to relate them to a

physical structure it can only be a matter of speculation. You will have to be very clear in your understanding. You have to do your own experiments with prana and the nadis, and have knowledge of your body. Only then can you become clear as to how nadis are different from nerves, and how prana is different from physical stimulation.

Do the five pranas modify during the period of pregnancy, and if so, how? What is the pranic relationship between the mother and the child in the womb?

According to the principles of yoga, formation of the body starts with the growth of the seed inside the womb, sometime after the fourth week. With the formation of the body, a link between the mother's body and the child's body is created. That link develops more and more with the passing of time and takes the form of the umbilical cord. This is the physical link.

There is another link and that is pranic. After the third month of pregnancy, the pranic field of the mother influences the embryo and infuses the first force of prana into that embryonic form; pranic activity begins to take place in the body which is being formed. This occurs mainly through a process of transfer of vibration.

Nowadays people are recognizing this kind of transfer; however, modern understanding is still very much on a physical level. Doctors say that at the time of pregnancy the mother should stop drinking and smoking and avoid any situation which will create stress and tension, because all that will cause an alteration in the normal structure which is being developed in the body.

Yogis understand this transfer in greater depth, and they advise that not only should the external lifestyle change, but also the way of thinking. The concept of spirituality must also be involved in the formation of a new body. The first transfer of prana from the mother's body into the child's body creates the first samskara in the child's personality. This pranic transfer is accepted by yoga.

Another kind of transfer takes place sometime between the sixth and the seventh month, and that is the entry of the soul into the child's body. This happens through the crown of the head of the mother, and we believe that we have found proof of this transfer.

One of the researchers from this ashram worked in England for some time with brain mapping. During his research, he discovered a very peculiar matter; however, he did not know he had found it. When he brought the slides back here and we started to analyze them, we came across slides of one pregnant lady on which were written: first week of pregnancy, second week, first month, second month, and so on. The slides from the fourth month onwards showed a distinct white spot right at the centre of the head.

I asked him, "What is that?" He said, "I don't know." We started comparing the earlier slides with these later ones as I had a nagging suspicion that we had hit upon something very important, and I presented the theory that it could be the soul entering through the crown of the mother's head. In the previous photographs there was no spot of any kind in that particular place. It only appeared from the fourth month onwards. After the birth of the child in the tenth month it had disappeared.

We did not have an opportunity for further experiment; however, in my opinion and according to yoga tradition, the transfer or infusion of spirit into the child's body through a channel in the mother's body appears to be a valid theory. We can see that in the head of a newborn baby, the crown is very soft. It is as if it has a hole on top which closes later on.

Yogis say that at the time of death, a yogi raises his prana up to the crown of the head and the soul or spirit leaves through *brahmarandhra*, the tenth gate. At that moment, the body becomes very light and begins to elevate. There is a photograph of Swami Sivananda in mahasamadhi which shows stones being placed on his body and people holding him down. The cloth on which he is sitting is being pulled inwards as if it is being gathered from the centre, like a bed

sheet being picked up from the middle. That kind of pranic manifestation and experience of the soul departing from the body can take place. However, not everybody leaves through the top of the head.

Generally, the soul departs through the eyes, which is why people die with their eyes open; or it leaves through the breath. The best death for a yogi is when the soul leaves through the crown of the head, and when it comes out, the skull cracks automatically like a coconut.

Three kinds of transfer take place from the mother's body into the child's body: One is the physical substance through the umbilical cord; the second is the pranic transfer in the form of vibrations after the third month; the third is the transfer of the soul from the mother's body into the child's body.

During pregnancy, the pranas act differently. Out of the five pranas, two become supersensitive and hyperactive. They are the samana energy and the prana energy of the thoracic and the mid-abdominal regions.

Samana energy or sub-prana is the force responsible for growth of the embryo and for the physical transfer of nutrients from the mother's body into the child's body through the agency of the umbilical cord. Prana located in the thoracic region is responsible for the infusion of, first, the pranic force, and second, the infusion of the spirit into the child's body at a later stage. The third prana, which becomes active in the ninth month, is apana. This alters the physical condition, allowing the child's body to come out from the mother's body. All three of these pranas are considered active at the time of pregnancy and delivery.

There are stories of babies who have been trained in different subjects, sciences and arts while still in the womb. From the yogic viewpoint, this idea is acceptable due to the fact that the sensitivity involved between the consciousness of the mother and child is very great.

In areas where a yogic way of life is accepted, it is emphasized that the mother should live in a constructive,

positive environment and leads very a balanced, harmonious and spiritual life, and listen to good spiritual music, not disco music or jazz. Can you imagine if your child begins to dance to disco music inside you? An expectant mother should read spiritual books which can create a positive samskara within the child, through her thoughts and analysis. Even during sleep she can listen to a recording which contains positive suggestions for the growth of the child.

The receptivity of the child's consciousness is very, very fine. Nowadays, we know that a baby who is in the womb will respond to a sound which is being played outside. Yoga says they are psychically receptive to the formation of new samskaras within them. Therefore, you should allow your children to express themselves spiritually more than you were permitted to as a child.

How many and which are the chakras for kundalini awakening? Should all the chakras be awakened or not?

There are two ways of understanding the chakras. One is the traditional way and the other is the yogic way. The word *chakra* means wheel or vortex of energy, and it also represents a state or dimension of experience. Experience of the chakras takes place on two levels: one of consciousness, the other of energy.

According to yoga, there are an infinite number of chakras located throughout the body. There are chakras in the legs, and chakras spread all over the body. These chakras are centres of energy which control the manifestation of prana in that specific part of the body. Amongst this great number of chakras, seven are considered to be major. These seven are located in the body in one straight line. Physically, an explanation is given that they are situated in the spinal region, but actually they are not located in the physical body. They are located in, or connected with, our pranic body.

According to the yogic theory, the first chakra is *mooladhara chakra*, the seat of the dormant energy known as

kundalini. This chakra is located in the region between the perineum and the coccyx.

The second chakra is *swadhisthana chakra*, the seat of the unmanifest mind. Generally it is said that it is the seat of the unconscious, but in actual fact it is the unmanifest mind, which contains the deep-rooted samskaras and karmas, and which shapes our personality.

The third chakra is *manipura chakra*, located behind the navel. It is the seat of pranic energy. The manifestation of prana is experienced in manipura.

The fourth chakra is *anahata chakra*, located behind the depression of the chest. It is the seat of the manifest mind in the form of emotions, feelings and sensations.

The fifth is *vishuddhi chakra*, located behind the throat. It is the seat of pure mind; the centre of transformation and purity.

The sixth chakra is *ajna chakra*, located behind the eyebrows, in the centre of the head. It is considered to be the seat of the super mind, the intuitive faculty or the place where one has the experience of divinity, of the inner guru.

The seventh chakra is *sahasrara chakra*, situated in the crown of the head.

Each chakra has been assigned an element, and there are other symbols as well which have been attributed to them.

The chakra system represents the manifestation of Shakti or Prakriti. The unmanifest Shakti or Prakriti is experienced in sahasrara as pure and transcendental. When the same energy, in the process of manifestation, decides to take the shape of an individual entity, it is experienced at ajna. When this same energy takes the form of infinite space, an element which contains all other elements in itself, then it takes the form of vishuddhi or ether-space. When energy is experienced as wind or air, then that is related to anahata chakra; the movement of energy or the movement of manifest mind. When energy is experienced as fire, it is related to manipura. Further down, it is experienced as the element of water in swadhisthana,

and finally as matter or earth in mooladhara. That is the manifestation of energy from pure and transcendental to gross and material.

Matter represents the final manifestation of this cosmic energy. It is in this form that the energy goes into a state of dormancy, and has been explained in yoga as kundalini. This is the order of the manifestation of energy.

What happens to the consciousness during all these manifestations? The consciousness has also gone through various states of transformation, and these changes in states of consciousness have been described as *shivalingas*. Pure consciousness is known as *jyoti linga*, the body of light or the luminous body. The subtle mind has been described as *dhumra linga* or the hazy or smoky body. The gross consciousness has been described as *shiva linga* or the body of matter. These three lingas represent the experience of consciousness in the different chakras.

The black shivalinga is the symbol of mooladhara. The hazy shivalinga is the symbol of anahata. The luminous shivalinga is the symbol of sahasrara. There is yet another experience of shivalinga which is the *sphatika linga* or the crystal awareness. This is experienced in atma. The purity of consciousness and energy is experienced as crystal. This is the yogic symbology.

As far as traditional symbology is concerned, according to the system of Vedanta, the supreme consciousness or *Purusha* manifests itself in various forms. In Vedanta this supreme consciousness is known as Brahman. Brahman does not mean God. It has a very beautiful meaning.

The word 'brahman' comes from the Sanskrit root *brihn*, which means expanding; something which continues to expand and there is no stopping it. It is consciousness which has no limits and continues to grow. So the perception of the highest consciousness is known as awareness or realization of Brahman. Brahman manifests first in the form of *prajna*.

Prajna means wisdom. It is the state of omniscience. The experience of consciousness at this level takes the form of

prajna purusha. The seat of prajna purusha is ajna. The seat of Brahman is sahasrara.

Prajna purusha has been related with the causal body. I am referring to the causal body in general terms, not in the sense that I described to you previously; do not confuse the Vedanta terms with the Samkhya terms. The causal body, in this context, is the experience of gross, subtle and causal experiences. The experience gained is in the form of knowledge or wisdom, which is a tool for further growth of consciousness.

The second manifestation of Brahman is in the form of hiranyagarbha. *Hiranyagarbha* means the golden womb. The seed in the womb is already in the causal body, but the womb from where manifestation begins to take place is in the subtle body. According to the vedantic texts, the location of hiranyagarbha is considered to be in the anahata region, and the related experiences are twofold, gross and subtle.

The third manifestation of Brahman is known as vishwanara, purusha or vishwa purusha. *Vishwa* means universe, and *nara* signifies something which is bound by the laws of time, space and object, something which decays. The consciousness which pervades the manifest world of matter is hence known as vishwa or *vishwanara*. The experience of vishwanara takes place in mooladhara.

Now we see a very peculiar relationship between the yogic and vedantic views. Prajna purusha is in ajna, which is quite acceptable as the centre of knowledge, wisdom and intuition. Hiranyagarbha is located in the heart region, which can be accepted if we consider anahata to be the seat of the manifest mind. However, at the same time the experiences of hiranyagarbha and prajna take place in vishuddhi. As you transcend the manifest mind, before reaching the final state of being as the knower, you pass through vishuddhi. This is before you can establish yourself as the seer.

In ajna, as in prajna, you are the witness, the seer to which the *Yoga Sutras* refer. In vishuddhi, the merging point of pure wisdom and the manifest mind is experienced. In manipura and swadhisthana, hiranyagarbha seems to control the

manifestations; in Vedanta, prana has also been considered as the originator of pranic experiences. Emotions, thoughts, sensations and feelings also have a pranic reaction and manifestation. They also have a link with the deep-rooted samskaras and karmas of the unmanifest mind; therefore, swadhisthana and manipura are also linked with anahata. Mooladhara stands alone as the experience of vishwa. It is here that our faculties of consciousness and energy are in a state of dormancy. Apart from this description, Vedanta also talks about lower and higher dimensions of experience, with chakras as the middle dimension.

The field of human experience is limited to the region of the chakras from mooladhara to sahasrara. However, there are seven more chakras above sahasrara and seven below mooladhara. In total, according to Vedanta, there are twenty-one stages of perception. The other chakras are not known as chakras; the ones below mooladhara are known as patalas and those above sahasrara are known as lokas. *Patalas* are areas of the instinctive, animal, mineral and vegetable worlds. *Lokas* are divine in nature: superhuman. We are in the middle dimension.

It is not necessary for all the chakras to be fully active prior to the awakening of kundalini. According to the tantric system, chakras never manifest in their full glory before the awakening.

The awakening of the chakras takes place in two stages. First is the form of *pranotthana* or the awakening of prana in each chakra. All our effort until now has been towards the awakening of the pranas in the chakras. The practices of hatha yoga – asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha – all aim at awakening the pranas. Once the chakras are partially awake due to the activity of prana, the ascent of kundalini begins to take place. Fifty percent of the awakening is controlled by the pranas and fifty percent by the actual kundalini.

According to kundalini yoga, the chakras can be stimulated by mantra, concentration on the yantras and mandalas, and the practices of kriya yoga and chakra

shuddhi yoga. The practices of raja yoga also play an important part in balancing the activity of the mind, which is experienced at the time of awakening. Awakening of kundalini is the final stage, as it represents the reversal of manifestation; matter is reconverted into the previous element and so forth. The process goes on until only the pure transcendental experience remains. With the awakening of kundalini, one definitely becomes a siddha. A *siddha* means one who is omnipotent.

Is there a different symbology for the chakras besides the eastern way?

In terms of spiritual experiences I do not think there is an oriental way or an occidental way. Just as there is no eastern science and western science, there cannot be an eastern experience or a western experience of spirituality. The results of physics or chemistry will be the same whether they are conducted in a lab in the US, the UK, Italy or India, although the way of describing them may differ.

Much pictorial evidence can be found in the ancient cultures of South America, Egypt and Scandinavia which presents a concept very similar to the present-day concept of chakras. They may not call ajna chakra 'ajna chakra', but the pictorial representation of that particular centre is similar.

Yantras, chakras and mandalas represent spiritual expressions of the human personality. No matter what name you call them they are the same. It is only our cultural and religious identity which has created a difference between spirituality in the East and West. The basic qualities inherent in every human being are the same. The same principle applies with the representation of a spiritual concept in different cultures at different times.

How can one detect pranic blockages in the chakras? Are there other techniques apart from hatha yoga to remove them?

Blockage of prana rarely takes place at the level of the chakras, as the prana in the chakras is subtle prana and not

the manifestation of the five: prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana. There are times when, in order to describe the pranic condition, we say that there is a block in a particular chakra; however, this is not an accurate description of the blockage.

Blocks are felt in the five pranas which control the autonomic functions of the body. The quality of prana inherent in the chakras is hardly ever in a state of imbalance. The harmony of this subtle prana can only be felt with the balancing of the five physical pranas, and that comes at a much later stage, when we begin to practise kriya or kundalini yoga. At that point we can begin to experience the flow of the subtle prana in the nadis.

In order to understand, there are only a few points to remember. The five pranas of prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana can be blocked, awakened or stimulated through the different practices of hatha yoga, mudra and bandha. The subtle prana which is inherent in the chakras is never impure or imbalanced, nor can it be blocked. The nadis, which act as the channels for this pranic force, are sometimes blocked due to impurities in the system or imbalance in the pranamaya kosha. The flow, which can be stopped due to this impurity of the nadis at any level of the chakra, will make us believe that the prana of the chakra is not in harmony with itself or is blocked.

The prana of the chakras is never blocked and can never be called impure, but nobody has had time to explain this in-depth, so the general term used is that the chakra is 'blocked'.

How does imbalance in the chakras relate to disease in the body?

There can never be an imbalance in the chakras. However, when prana is imbalanced there will be problems related to the lungs, heart, circulatory system, etc. When there is an imbalance in apana, there will be problems or diseases of the reproductive organs, kidneys, pancreas, liver and intestines.

Having the appendix removed is a samana problem. Digestive problems, constipation, gas, indigestion and gallbladder problems represent imbalance of samana. These are physical conditions related with the physical pranas.

There are certain mental conditions which are also related with the pranas, but normally we say they are related to the chakras. The common understanding of the chakras, and the theory which we have been told, is different to the actual principles of energy in the chakras.

Swadhisthana is generally described as representing the unconscious mind. In actual fact it represents the unmanifest mind, and there is a great difference between the unmanifest mind and the unconscious. Nonetheless, if somebody suffers from an attack of anxiety or depression or lack of proper positive self-image, then that condition is generally attributed to swadhisthana chakra, as these psychological conditions are supposed to be inherent in our unconscious mind.

Similarly, if somebody has emotional problems or traumas, it is said that anahata is playing up. In this sense, one can relate a psychic or psychological problem with a particular chakra. Each problem does tend to correspond to a particular quality and nature of a chakra. However, in reality, even psychological problems are related to the manifestations of the pranas. The chakras simply represent a concept and a dimension of experience of the manifestation of consciousness and energy. Therefore, attributing psychological or emotional problems to the chakras is incorrect.

With the practices of hatha yoga, pranayama, raja yoga, kriya yoga or kundalini yoga, many physiological and psychological disorders are resolved. This is because these practices first balance out or harmonize the imbalance of the pranic body before the practitioner attempts to awaken the chakras.

With the ironing out of the pranamaya kosha or pranic body, 99.9 percent of human problems are sorted out. The

remaining 0.1 percent sorts itself out when the chakras open up, and that 0.1 percent is a very deep psychic fear, not a disease or illness. That psychic fear is the quick-fix glue that fixes everything except broken hearts. It can fix anything and everything and it joins everything together in the same way. It is the fear of losing one's identity that is dealt with finally with the awakening of the chakras. Nobody wants to lose their identity, because that is the glue of our personality, which holds our body, mind, emotions and spirit together. The identity of 'I am'.

A very big problem arises when this fear is not dealt with properly and kundalini is awakened. It has been called the great kundalini crack-up, or explosion. It is the breaking up of every kind of personality structure and one loses self-control and becomes directionless. There is no treatment for that condition. Well, there is one, which is very hard. However, I will not tell you as I need to have some secret tools of the trade.

What kind of relationship is there between the chakras and the related organs?

Physiologically, a relationship can be described between the chakras and the organs in which the chakras are supposedly situated. In order to find a physical location for the chakras, different glands have been related to them. For example, the pineal and pituitary correspond with ajna and sahasrara. The thyroid and parathyroid in the throat correspond with vishuddhi. The thymus corresponds with anahata chakra. A certain relationship has therefore been observed between the glands and chakras, as well as with various organs which are said to be controlled by the chakras.

In *Kundalini Tantra* the relationship between the chakras and the physical organs, and the pranic and causal bodies, has been described. In order to gain a good understanding of that relationship, you should read this book. It will clarify many of the doubts and concepts, as it is a very lengthy subject.

Are mooladhara and swadhisthana important at a cosmic level for the continuation of humanity?

It seems from this question that you are trying to relate mooladhara and swadhisthana with organs of reproduction. Cosmically speaking, creation can only take place when energy is in mooladhara, because energy in mooladhara provides the final shape of matter. If you have a different idea about creation and are not looking for an object made of matter, then the same concept applies in the various chakras.

Life with the element of water is created in swadhisthana. There are spirits, deities and demons of water which never interact with the dimensions of matter. They do not have a body made of matter like ours. There are spirits of manipura, the fire element, who likewise do not have a body made out of matter and they are not similar to those of the water element. Similarly, there are spirits of air which are created at the time of anahata awakening. Some are bad, some are good, it is very difficult to say. Good and bad are two sides of the same coin.

One thing is certain; with the passing of energy into a different form or dimension, creation takes place. If the world of matter is destroyed, life will continue in other forms, because that has been the way of interaction between energy and consciousness. In physical terms, mooladhara is necessary for physical creation, but that has nothing to do with the reproductive organs of a physical body. The world was created long before the sexes. Creation takes place in every dimension.

Is it true that globally this is the time for the awakening of anahata chakra?

Globally, I do not know which chakra is awakening now. In my opinion, it is very much a swadhisthana experience, because all the changes that are taking place in the world are due to the ambitions, desires and fears that are inherent in our personality. The social, political and other changes which are happening in different countries of the world represent a particular form of desire. Once they are able

to find stability in their swadhisthana, and balance out the hyperactive social condition which is a manifestation of global manipura awakening, then the human qualities of anahata will definitely come to the surface.

It is a storm before the calm that we are passing through now. When that calm comes, we shall be aware of the positive qualities inherent within us, and that will be the anahata awakening. Right now, we want change in order to fulfil our ambitions and gain security and contentment within the social structure.

What is the relationship between kundalini rising and enlightenment?

The process of illumination culminates in sahasrara. The rising of kundalini from mooladhara through the chakras to sahasrara is the process of illumination.

In the process of illumination, the consciousness goes through various stages of experience. Finally, when all the external, subtle, astral and causal experiences are finished, it stabilizes itself in awareness of the supreme or universal consciousness. Kundalini awakening is the reversal of the process of manifestation. With the rising of kundalini, a merger of the gross elements with their subtle counterpart takes place. The form of a particular element, tattwa and experience dissolves until finally only pure awareness and energy remain. In human dimensions, mooladhara is the beginning of illumination and sahasrara is the culmination.

According to Samkhya philosophy, the concept of illumination is said to be freedom from bondage and suffering. According to vedantic philosophy, the concept of illumination is having constant experience of divinity in every strata and dimension of life. According to tantric philosophy, it is the merger of the dual forces, Shiva and Shakti. According to yogic philosophy, it is becoming aware of the seer and experiencing a higher dimension of consciousness. According to 'Swan' philosophy, it is the full use of common sense in day-to-day life.

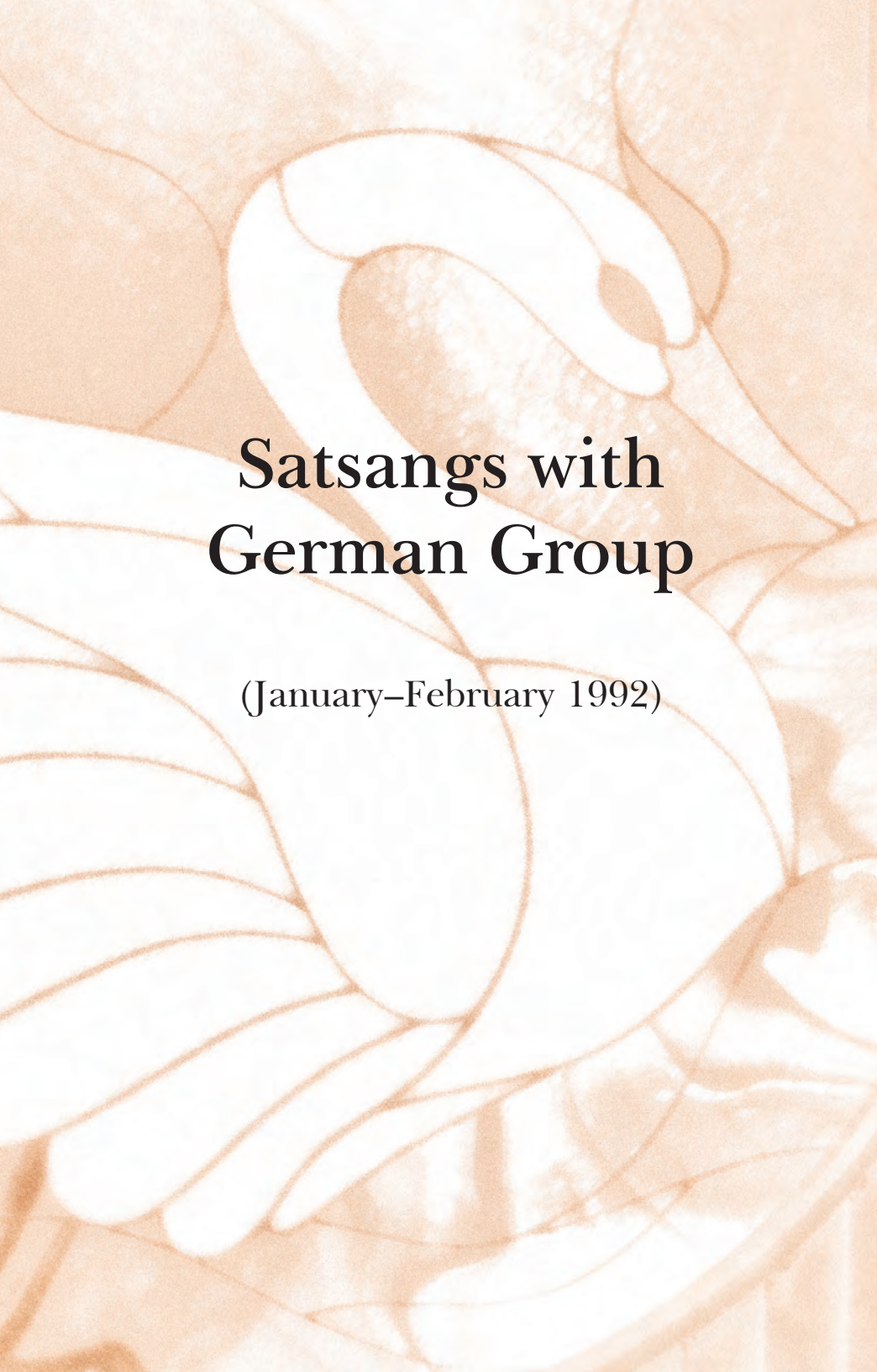
There are many different definitions of illumination in all the traditions, so think for a moment which concept is applicable to you. Every system has given its own interpretation, but ultimately they mean and represent the same thing.

Human life is subject to various experiences of time, space and object, and in the process of having these experiences one goes through various states of expression and behaviour, and encounters limitations within one's personality. The expressions which take place due to the mind, and the limitations which express themselves because of the mind, are due to restricted awakening of our inner personality.

The mind, which is a subject of Prakriti, is constantly under bondage. We have to first overcome the limitations of our inner nature, and then develop the strength which can elevate us to these great heights within the field of consciousness, and then experience those states with a transcendental mind. This is the concept of illumination.

Sri Swamiji says that illumination is a transcendental experience which cannot be had with a non-transcendental mind. In order to have a transcendental experience, you have to change the whole structure of the normal mind, and this is the process of kundalini awakening; from mooladhara to ajna and sahasrara, the transcendental mind experiences the transcendental reality.





Satsangs with German Group

(January–February 1992)



A saint was once asked, “How to be free?” The saint asked in turn, “What has bound you?” After some moments the reply came, “Nothing has bound me. I am not bound by anything.” The saint said, “If nothing binds you then why ask how to be free?”

You must know where and what is the bondage from which you want liberation. Memories of the past and expectations of the future cause pain, anxiety and fear. Expectations in life are therefore bondage, as they are always for the future or from the past.

Remember that the past is a memory which has allowed you to grow. You are the present, and the future is endless. There is no bondage in the present because the present only exists in the now. The moment you wake up to the present, all bondage, fear and anxiety drop away.

Expectation for the future and from the past is bondage, but expectation is also the origin of the desire for freedom. It becomes the basis of freedom.

The beginning of freedom should be freeing yourself from the effort of becoming free. This is a beginning and not the end. You should realize that you are freedom.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Have you any spiritual experience?

Satsang generally means 'in the company of truth'. It is composed of two words: *sat* meaning truth and *sang* which means 'in the company of'. However, I can assure you that you cannot expect any truthful satsang from me, because only that person who has attained an advanced kind of understanding about the Self, human nature and the cosmos can give satsang.

I am a plain student, a seeker like all of you here, but I will still try to make an effort to explain things which I have understood in life. Certain things have crossed my mind, some kind of understanding and awareness has been achieved, but frankly speaking there are many things which I do not understand about these experiences. Spiritual experiences in their true context happen to very few people.

The term 'spiritual experience' itself means an experience which happens when you are in contact with your inner spirit. I believe that before having those kinds of experiences we go through other stages, which can generally be termed as spiritual awareness or experience, but which in reality are mind-related experiences. I can talk about the mind experiences, not the spiritual.

In the process of purification the mind goes through certain changes, stages and metamorphoses. These experiences represent a type of inner awareness in which a person

does not have voluntary control. They happen either due to divine grace, a state of psychic unfolding, or purification of the inner personality; and also many times due to purification and purging of the samskaras and karmas. I classify the mind experiences into four categories. I will give one example of each of these.

Divine grace: The first, which I consider an experience of divine grace, happened when I was just a child. Maybe I was four or five at that time. I remember having a fever so high that the doctors had given up hope of my survival. Even today, I remember the acute pain in my body and the delirium, and I vaguely recall my mother sitting beside my bed and saying, “Just pray to God and guru.” I looked at her and there were tears in her eyes, as if she felt that I was counting my last breaths.

She sat beside my bed the whole night doing her mantra, and every few minutes she would tell me to repeat or call out Sri Swamiji’s name. I do not know when I went to sleep but I had a very peculiar dream that I was trying to run from something; however, my feet were glued to the floor. No matter how hard I tried I could not move my body. Something or somebody was chasing me and I was trying desperately to get away.

A figure of light appeared. Some words passed between the figure and the entity chasing me. Then I remember a nice warm sensation coming over my body and the figure saying, “You have nothing to fear now.” The fever which I had, which was about 40.5–41°C and increasing, began to drop and become normal within the span of about one hour. I consider that an experience which happened due to the grace of the Divine. After that day I do not remember falling uncontrollably sick; just the normal colds and coughs and a tiny bit of fever, but nothing serious.

Psychic unfolding: Another form of experience took place when I was doing a form of kundalini sadhana. I can attribute these experiences to some kind of psychic awareness. I used to dream of fearsome snakes. In those

dreams I had to walk across a pit full of hundreds and thousands of snakes crawling and slithering all over the place. It was a form of lucid dreaming, dreaming with awareness, but I also used to know that, even though I was dreaming, if a snake were to bite me I would die. I knew that it was not an ordinary dream, but had something to do with my inner personality. There was never any fear, only the knowledge that I had to handle the snakes, and if I could handle them I could handle my kundalini.

One full-moon night in Mangrove Mountain, Australia, I was sleeping when I heard someone calling out my name. I used to sleep in an A-frame up in the mountain which I had built myself with the help of another sannyasin. To reach it we had to go through a small creek and a bush, a footpath full of leeches and other jungle goodies.

When I heard my name being called out I was fully awake. I thought to myself, "Who could be calling me at this unearthly hour of 11 o'clock when the whole ashram is fast asleep?" The call was persistent, so I decided to go out and investigate. It was very dense bush. There were a lot of trees and the light from the moon was filtering through the leaves. As I walked along the footpath, I came to a point where my right foot, which was raised to go another step forward, just became paralyzed.

I was looking straight ahead, not at the ground. So when I found that I was physically unable to move forward, it was as if I had come in front of an invisible wall. I looked down and just six inches under my right foot was a tiger snake. The tiger snake is one of the deadliest snakes in Australia, but the funny thing was, that I did not feel any fear. I simply brought my right foot back and sat down about twelve inches away from it.

I looked at it and it turned and looked at me. Our gaze locked for what seemed to be an eternity, but was actually only about one minute or so. Then it slithered away and the moment it started to go I stopped hearing my name being called. I thought to myself, "It was the snake which had

called me.” I returned to my A-frame and had a good sleep. This kind of experience I would attribute to some kind of psychic perception or awareness.

Samskara purging: The third experience is related to a desire samskara. When I was in Europe I had to go to America. I had applied to the US Embassy for a visa, but it was a different type of visa and the process was complicated, so I did not know when the visa was going to come through. I was quite anxious not knowing what would happen; would I get permission or would I be rejected? Those doubts used to go through my mind. There was also a lot of anxiety because Sri Swamiji had told me that I had to go and here I was depending on the councillor to give me that visa.

I started dreaming of a jigsaw puzzle at night. Every night I used to dream that I fitted a piece in, and then I would forget about it the next day. I could never remember what kind of puzzle it was when I woke up, but every night I would fit in a piece and I knew the exact layout of the puzzle. On the same day that I put in the last piece of the puzzle and completed it, I got my visa. The puzzle was the map of the US. Even today when I think about it, I cannot understand it or believe it. I would attribute this to a samskara mind experience.

Kundalini sadhana experience: It was my habit that between Christmas and New Year I would get in the car and go off to a place of solitude. There is a place in California which is known as the Death Valley. It is the lowest point in that area and gets incredibly hot. I went there in the car and pitched my tent. I had enough supplies to last me for one week and I started practising my kundalini sadhana in a very relaxed frame of mind.

One night I heard this very loud music, so I thought “Who could be playing this loud music in the middle of the Death Valley?” It was as if someone had turned on the stereo full volume and was having a very good party. I flashed the torchlight. There was nobody around, but still the music continued. I got into the car, started the engine, turned on

the car lights and drove around to see if anybody was there. Nobody was to be seen, neither high nor low! And still the music continued.

For two or three nights I could not sleep because of that loud, jazzy type of music. Then I realized it was happening inside my head. The moment I realized that, I could turn the volume down. I could hear any kind of music: Western, classical, rock, jazz, Indian classical; I just had to think of the type of music and then I could reproduce the same on the organ. I also developed an uncanny ability to read people's minds as if they were talking in front of me. That lasted for about six months. And believe me, it is not a joke, I could read anybody's mind, anybody's thought!

When I stopped the kundalini sadhana, that experience slowly went away. I would attribute this kind of experience to a state of purification which I had possibly attained when I was practising these advanced sadhanas.

Mind sight: Another thing which happened quite often was that if I had to speak on a particular subject, I used to dream that I was giving a lecture. Many times I used to be given a subject about which I did not know A, B or C. At night I used to give lectures to myself in my sleep on this subject. The next morning, after waking up, I would write down the main points and then speak on those. I can give better lectures in my sleep than when I am awake! Those kinds of experiences I would attribute to 'mind sight'.

So you see, one can have many kinds of experiences but they have to be understood properly. Every experience is the unfolding of an area or faculty of mind. Personally, I can never accept anybody saying that they are spiritual experiences. For me, spiritual experiences mean something very different and transcendental.

I do not believe that seeing the light is spiritual. I do not believe that seeing heaven or hell in visions is spiritual, because whatever the experiences are, they can be described later on. However, if one has a true spiritual experience, it can never be described, because it touches the very core of

one's inner being. It transforms the intellect, the mind and the consciousness. One cannot remain alive after that; in the sense that we consider ourselves to be alive now. No, one does not die, but that person lives in a very different dimension altogether.

What is prana?

Let us first look at the concept of prana in brief. *Prana* is the name of an energy field which pervades the entire cosmos. This energy field is not only inherent in bodies which contain energy, but also in inanimate objects. The concept of prana encompasses every kind of energy known and unknown in the universe. There are physical energies, mental energies and psychic energies. They are inherent in an object, in a body, in matter.

Apart from this there are other material energies which are considered to be a part of prana. One very materialistic example is radio waves which are a type of energy. X-rays are a type of energy, and even these can be considered as being a manifestation of prana or universal energy. Scientifically, these types of energy waves and physical energies have been given names such as magnetic waves of the body, electrical waves of the body and bio-energy. They are all part of a cosmic energy having a non-material and a material source. Normally prana represents a broad concept of energy on every level of creation. Nowadays, the term prana is mainly used to define the individual and cosmic energy fields.

In the Upanishads it has been stated that when God wanted to manifest Himself in many forms He first created a pair. This pair, in religious terms, is represented by the body of a male and a female. In spiritual terms it represents two forces, yin and yang. The concept of yin and yang has been represented in the Upanishads as Aditya and Rei. Yin and yang respectively represent the negative and positive poles of energy, the unmanifest and the manifest nature of energy, the mental and vital energies. *Aditya* means solar energy and has been associated with the vital aspect of creation, the vital

energy. *Rei* represents the mental energy or the lunar force governing the invisible dimensions.

The visible aspect of energy rules the world of appearances, which is dominated by the solar force, and this solar energy controls the manifestation of matter. The world of matter is represented by the human, animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms.

The mental energy is known as *Rei*. Although it is not accurate to link *Rei* with mental energy, we have to use the word 'mental', but it actually means 'subtle'. *Rei* represents the subtle manifestation of energy in matter. If we look at our own bodies we will become aware of two types of energy. Through one type we control our physical activity and movements and through the other we become aware of the mental aspect. In the mental or subtle aspect, we are aware of conscious, subconscious and unconscious activities; we become aware of name, form and idea. There is an awareness of total consciousness.

With the creation of *Aditya* and *Rei* other aspects of elements and *tattwas* were brought under control. Here, control means having an awareness of their ability and limitations. The strengths and weaknesses of the *tattwas* were known. Again there was an interaction between these two forces, and these interactions were the cause of creation. This is the theory as propounded by the Upanishads. The Upanishads further explain that the *prana* which is a combination of *Aditya* and *Rei* is known as *maha prana*, which pervades the entire manifest and unmanifest creation. Out of this came manifestation, and this manifestation is known as *Purusha*. *Purusha* has sixteen parts, thus the Sanskrit name is *shodaskhala Purusha*. The sixteen parts of *Purusha* represent the gradual manifestation of energy from subtle to gross. This is the traditional interpretation of *prana*, and it is also the most complete explanation available.

Thus, first of all God created a pair known as *Aditya* and *Rei*. *Aditya* controls the manifest world, *Rei* rules the subtle world. The combination of these two gives birth to another

identity of prana. This was further classified into sixteen groups. The first group represents the five bhootas. *Bhoota* literally means 'spirit' or 'inherent power'. It is the inherent nature or quality. Normally the concept of bhoota is related to the tattwas.

The tattwas are the manifest elements: sky, air, fire, water and earth which have a definite function, a definite form of experience. Earth cannot be experienced as sky. Water cannot be experienced as air. Fire cannot be experienced as matter. This manifestation is the manifestation of the tattwas, but the inherent quality, nature or power of the elements is known as bhootas. Thus, the first division is in the form of bhootas or inherent nature. The second type of manifestation is in the form of a cognitive experience of the bhootas. The third aspect is the manifestation of the tattwas. Prana pervades these three dimensions of bhootas, matter, experience, and final manifestation.

Then we go into another realm of pranic manifestation. In this other dimension it manifests as individual mind. This individual mind is the cognitive mind of every being. Birds, animals, insects and humans have cognitive faculties. Suppose you have one amoeba and in front of it you place a grain of rice and a drop of acid. The amoeba will skirt around the drop of acid and go straight for the grain of rice. That amoeba does not have a brain which can be observed through scientific instruments. Nor does it have a nervous system. It does not have a mind according to any concept that we know. Then how does it differentiate between a drop of acid and a grain of rice? That inherent awareness in any and every kind of life form is the manifestation of prana as the original mind, or the original cognitive force which is linked with individuality. The individuality then manifests in many different forms, and from this point, division between consciousness and energy takes place.

Until now, the concept of consciousness and energy has been linked with prana. They are not two distinct fields of experience. They are fused in one identity, in prana. In

this state of fusion of consciousness and energy in prana, the whole thing is in the form of a cosmic force. With the manifestation of individual mind the two entities become separated.

After the mind, come other aspects or attributes of mind. Intellect has been defined as an attribute of consciousness. Prana has been classified as both physical and psychic. This is after the manifestation of the individual mind. The physical aspect of prana is experienced in the body in the form of the five pranas; in the form of nervous, muscular and gross physical energy; in the form of automatic, autonomic responses of the body. So, in a human being, this is the manifestation of prana.

In all these manifestations from universal prana to manifest prana, sixteen steps are taken. What are these sixteen steps? Let us look at them. Individual mind is the birth of Purusha. Mind with its faculties of buddhi, chitta and ahamkara comprises the first four manifestations. Then appear the five organs of cognition. These five organs of cognition are known as *jnanendriyas*. Then arise the five organs of action which form the physical body, known as the *karmendriyas*. Interaction between the subtle and external body is at the level of the subtle pranas of the chakras and five physical pranas.

Can you talk about initiation, mantra diksha, spiritual name and karma sannyasa?

Initiation is an ancient tradition, not only in yoga, but in every culture. The simple and common meaning of the word 'initiation' is to begin or to start. This new beginning involves a new perception and a desire to discover new things, and represents the effort that a person makes to go in that direction. The literal meaning of diksha is 'to see'.

There have been traditions in the past that involve initiation at different stages of life. In ancient cultures initiations were performed. There are many tribes in Africa which perform a special ceremony when a young boy attains

maturity. Even the concept of baptism in Christianity is initiation. In Egypt, the monks and priests used to perform meditative and other initiations. The shamans in South America still perform types of ritual and initiation.

In the yogic tradition, initiation has been limited to three areas. First is mantra initiation. This is done when a person decides to investigate the mental dimension. In the process of mantra initiation a particular sound is utilized. A point of concentration is required and the awareness of different activities of the mind and body is necessary. Combined, these create an altered state of mind which changes the inner perception by facilitating relaxation, concentration and one-pointedness.

When, with the help of a sound, we go into our mind, the ability to know the various faculties of mind, along with the strength to control inner dissipation is achieved. The use of mantra also unfolds the inner psychic personality. Mantra is utilized to create a state of harmony between external and internal life, so that body and mind are able to function as one unit.

The next stage of initiation is the giving of a spiritual name. The body is recognized by a name, Tom, Dick or Harry, and that name then begins to represent our individuality and nature. Many cultures in the past have given the names of days to their children, and there are many tribes in India which name their children according to the day they are born. That becomes their identity for the rest of their lives. Just as the body is given a name which represents the external identity, the spirit is given a name in order that the initiate becomes aware of the nature of the spirit.

Our inner being is ruled by the spirit or soul, and the experiences which we gain through the spirit are different from those that we attain through the mind or body. The inherent quality of spirit is recognized by a spiritual name and that becomes your spiritual identify. Legally you may be known as Mr Tom Smith, but spiritually you need a different identity.

This spiritual name is the link between awareness of the mind and awareness of the spirit. It is a constant reminder of a particular nature or inherent quality and is the awakening of a spiritual identity. While I am in society, I am Mr Such-and-Such, Dr Jekyll, and when I am within myself I am Mr Hyde, I hide my spiritual identity within myself. The spiritual name links the mind with the inner soul.

The third type of initiation is into *sannyasa*. *Sannyasa* is a life of inner dedication and transformation; a life of commitment to the Self, to humanity and to God. I have not used the word guru here, please remember. Self, humanity and God are the life of a sannyasin. Self-development or self-perfection is the first aspect. Service to uplift society to the best of our abilities is the second aspect, and inner commitment to the realization of a divine force is the third aspect.

When we do not know how to go about fulfilling these three requirements, then the help of a guru is needed. How do we perfect ourselves? How do we realize the Self within? It is a continuous process of discovery which involves external and internal effort, a process which makes one aware of one's physical, psychological and emotional strengths and weaknesses.

It is our habit and nature to feel insecure. Insecurity is felt when we encounter situations where the basic belief and structure of the personality is threatened. It is here that a guru is very necessary. He is able to tell us of methods to overcome problem areas, how to handle the disruptions of the human personality, and how to build the inner strength which will lead us in our spiritual life.

In the second aspect of commitment to humanity, guru is also needed. How do we help society? Every businessman, every industry and social institution helps society. We help by imparting understanding or knowledge which can provide the means to overcome daily problems and provide a deeper insight into human nature. Better education about the self is one of the best forms of social service.

The concept of God in sannyasa does not contradict or come into conflict with individual belief. The spirit is experienced inside. Externally, you fulfil all your obligations and commitments, and internally you are aware of the divine force and radiance emanating from within you. This force, coming through you, touches the lives of other people. It infuses every being with whom you come into contact with a sense of commitment, spirit of love, compassion, service and devotion which transcends every kind of selfishness in the personality. An inner perception of the divine is experienced in every state of life and there is full communion with that reality which lies behind appearance.

Sannyasa tries to make one aware of two aspects of the world: appearance and reality. We live constantly in the world of appearances and confuse it with reality. When reality is experienced, appearances disappear. So, even to provide this basic understanding, a guru is required, and where the efforts of the external guru stop, the inner guru takes over. There are many people who feel that the external guru is not necessary if one can realize one's inner guru, but in order to have that experience an external guru is a must. Only he or she can lead you to the inner guru.

Somebody once asked me, "Why do you have a guru? Why don't you try to experience your inner guru?" I thought about it for some time and replied, "Just as you need an external wife to satisfy your desires and you cannot do with an inner wife, in the same way one needs an external guru." There are two basic strengths necessary for sannyasa. They are known as viveka and vairagya. *Viveka* means right perception, and the ultimate aim of viveka is to make one aware of the reality behind the appearance. Before coming to this point there are many stages through which one has to pass.

Vairagya means non-attachment. In life, we are constantly under the sway of attraction and repulsion. If you like somebody, or you love somebody there is immense attraction, and that causes attachment which in turn causes dependency. Even in repulsion there is attachment. If

you dislike somebody you constantly think about them. How you hate them! So even in hating you are attached. Therefore, vairagya does not mean detachment, it means non-attachment. Detachment means to move away from something and disassociate yourself from it. Non-attachment means that things can remain just as they are, but you are neither attracted towards them nor repulsed by them and you continue to strive for perfection while being non-attached.

Ultimately, sannyasa means total freedom: freedom from the bondage of life; freedom from the fear of living and dying. Unfortunately, many of the modern-day swamis begin to express their freedom in the marketplace or pub, saying, "I am free." Expressing oneself irrationally in the marketplace or pub is not a sign of freedom. It is a sign of mental imbalance and immaturity. With sannyasa there is maturity and social awareness.

Sannyasa is an ancient tradition which combines external living and inner experience with living in the spirit. It is a tradition which seeks to harmonize the body with mind and the mind with spirit, in total awareness.

Last year, when we were having the sannyasa course we formulated certain rules. Sannyasa was divided into three categories, in common speech, beginner's sannyasa, intermediate sannyasa and advanced sannyasa. In its real concept sannyasa has three traditions known as jignasu, karma and poorna sannyasa systems. A fourth has also been defined, but we have not yet found the right candidates. That is *rishi sannyasa*, which is a combination of husband and wife leading the sannyasa way of life together.

Each system requires certain qualifications. We have made a brief outline of those qualifications, or I would rather say requirements, to be developed. There are weaknesses in everybody. There is no way to avoid it, but we can develop certain positive strengths and qualities at each stage which will be conducive to smooth progress into the real stage, which ultimately culminates in poorna sannyasa.

What is the deeper purpose behind kirtan?

One is not just an experience of body, mind or spirit. There is an indefinable, subtle link which controls all the factors of body, mind and spirit. We identify ourselves with the body; that is one mistake that we make. We identify ourselves with the mind and that is another mistake, because it is like identifying with the two arms, and forgetting about the trunk to which they are joined. Without the trunk the arms are useless. Just as the trunk is needed to provide motion and co-ordination to the arms, in the same way prana is needed to link the faculties of body and mind together.

If you remove prana, the body is simply dead matter and the mind is non-existent, just as without the trunk the arms are useless. Without prana, body and mind become useless. Prana is one thing with which we never identify. We can think of the body as being one independent and individual unit. We identify with the different experiences of the mind. We are aware of our likes and dislikes. We are aware of our desires, passions and ambitions. We function according to our mental framework, but we do not have pranic awareness. That is the common lifestyle of people who identify with the body or the mind.

Yoga practitioners, spiritual aspirants and sadhakas learn how to identify with prana, because prana is the under-current which makes the other energies of body and mind flow in one direction. Prana can be activated or awakened, and it can be further channelled with the help of mantras. Therefore songs, kirtans, music and mantras have been considered as powerful tools to alter the personality and perception. There are pieces of music which take one very deep inside, and, conversely, there are musical compositions which totally shatter one's concentration and attention. One type can create deep and intense inner harmony while the other can cause total disruption of the mental structure.

When there is harmony in music and mantra it re-structures the whole pranic flow. When the pranic flow is organized in a particular way, the body and mind begin to move with the rhythm of the music and mantra. When there

is total harmony between body, mind and prana together with the mantra, it is known as *bhava samadhi*, ecstasy, where every action and emotion has fused into one. The body becomes a tool for the expression of an emotion, and the mind becomes a tool for the expression of an action. Bhava samadhi develops awareness of our inner spirit.

There is a word in Japanese, 'wa', which means energy field. That wa of the body and mind become unified by means of music and mantra. It is here that one becomes an instrument of celestial music. This is only possible when one pursues the bhava of kirtan in the true sense. Thus, kirtan is not just an emotional outburst. Rather, kirtan becomes the means by which we dive into our emotions and experience our inner expansiveness.

In the beginning, how one sings does not really matter, but as one becomes more and more attuned to the mantra, music and prana, then even the slightest deviation is a great shock. Therefore kirtans and mantra should be perfected to the best of our ability.

Is it possible to combine yoga teaching with other things, like massage, spiritual dance, the Feldenkrais system, ESP, primal scream and rebirthing?

Everybody has their opinions on this subject, and I can appreciate and understand their viewpoints, knowing fully well that they do not understand the complete depths of yoga. Such teachers are like doctors who claim to practise allopathy but only know how to give aspirin at the time of a headache. For other problems they have absolutely no understanding of the other techniques of treatment. They have no knowledge of any other treatment apart from aspirin. So when asthma cases come, they give aspirin, when surgery is needed they give aspirin, and in order to compensate for their lack of understanding, they begin to use other common techniques available in the market.

If one knows and understands yoga in its fullness there will not be any need for any other kind of practice. From

my understanding and studies and from a number of things I have learnt from Sri Swamiji, I can only say one thing: although yoga fulfils the physical and mental requirements of an individual, it goes much deeper than that. If yoga can help in the management and treatment of arthritis, and if yoga can also take one to great heights of self-realization, then why not believe that it can deal with those areas of life which people need to know and experience?

The system of yoga is based on the mind. I will give you an example. The practice of rebirthing is a revised and modified technique of bhastrika pranayama. The technique of primal scream is nothing but an advanced version of antar mouna. ESP combines various practices of pratyahara. Every kind of so-called modern, holistic approach is contained within the yogic structure. Therefore, for a person who has an in-depth understanding of yoga, no inclusion of other techniques is required.

Please give us guidelines for teaching yoga.

The first rule in teaching yoga is: never pretend to know more than you do, and never teach more than you have actually experienced and learned. That has been my principle all my life. If I do not know something, I simply say, "I am sorry, I do not know."

I have come across many teachers who, after learning the first series of pawanmuktasana, became well-known overnight. Every night they study literature on hatha yoga, from Bihar School of Yoga, Iyengar and others and then, without trying the practices themselves, they go and teach. That is a very dangerous thing for the students, as well as for the yoga teacher, because the students may break their backs. I have also come across many yoga teachers who, on the very first day of teaching, make their students perform headstands. Then later on when the students complain of high blood pressure and neck pain, the teachers do not know what to do.

The second rule which should be applied by all yoga teachers is: understand the body, feel the body, experience

the body. Especially at the time of teaching, yoga teachers should have the ability to feel another person's body. A yoga teacher might be sitting quietly, but mentally he should experience the same stiffness or flexibility which the students are experiencing. This is a very important thing if one wants to teach properly.

The third rule for yoga teaching, and the final one for now, although it can be continued: know the need, aspirations, strengths and limitations of every student. Without actually understanding these, it is not possible to teach yoga. Without knowing all these things, teaching yoga is a purely mechanical process, whereas with the understanding of all these factors, it becomes a process of human interaction.

For teaching yoga do I need a guru, a tradition?

Absolutely not, and frankly speaking, you are far better off without these things, as long as you remain a simple asana teacher. When you teach yoga for trimming the waist and making faces beautiful, or for reducing weight, you are a teacher of asana. If you wish to remain a yoga teacher like that, you do not need a guru or a tradition.

If you wish to further your knowledge regarding the formation of an integrated personality, however, then knowledge of a tradition is a requirement. Tradition represents a reliable, tested system through which one can have an in-depth understanding of the human personality. If you wish to apply yoga for your own spiritual evolution, for the capacity to help others, and for the ability to deal with the requirements of body, mind and spirit, then a guru is a requirement. Decide which kind of yoga teacher you wish to become and take up that job.

We train at least two thousand yoga teachers a year. Many of them come to Bihar School of Yoga (BSY) for one month, take their diploma away with them, and we never hear from them again. They represent the first category of yoga teachers. Out of these, there are a few who return to

deepen their understanding of yoga. They participate in sadhana courses, advanced yoga training programs and kriya courses. They represent teachers of the second category, who simply come to increase their knowledge and understanding and then go back and do their own thing. Out of those remaining, some people return, saying they wish to take up the system of yoga for their own development as well as having the ability to help others.

As a first step they take mantra diksha and affiliate themselves with the Institution. The second step is to begin to teach the practices of yoga as taught at BSY. As a third step they take karma sannyasa and participate in intense activities. The fourth stage is when they have had enough of that and take up poorna sannyasa. Then they stay here for some time. The fifth step, after completing their sannyasa training, is to go out and establish themselves as sannyasins and teachers in their own right. This is so in India; I think it is similar all over the world.

What is the system of transmission between guru and disciple?

Another name for transmission is *shaktipat*. Do not confuse my use of the word 'shaktipat' with the tradition of Swami Muktananda, the Siddha Yoga meditation which is a form of initiation. There are different types of initiation according to the tantras and yogas. The common forms of initiation are mantra, name and sannyasa. They are the external initiations given by the teacher to the student.

The fourth type of initiation is transmission, which is known as shaktipat. Even in this there are different categories. There is transmission by touch. There is also transmission by sight, by thought and by psychic energy. These are the four most common types of shaktipat diksha. It is here that a link between guru and disciple is experienced.

The different types of initiation represent different kinds of links with the guru. Initially, when there is progress in the life of the aspirant, the guru uses touch transmission

in order to awaken his spiritual energy and provide him with new experiences. An intellectual relationship with the guru leads to touch initiation. An emotional relationship with the guru leads to sight initiation. A relationship which happens due to the concentrated faculties of the mind leads to thought initiation. Psychic awareness of the guru leads to psychic shaktipat, an initiation which forms a link between the energies of the guru and the disciple.

The first form of initiation is when a disciple relates to a guru on the intellectual level and the guru is able to awaken the rational understanding of a spiritual process. Then through the intellect the spiritual energies are awakened. In a sense, this type of initiation can also be called jnana yoga initiation, where spiritual experiences are awakened through intellect, *buddhi* or rationality. This kind of spiritual experience requires physical contact, in order to convey the guru's energy into the disciple's personality.

The second form of initiation, by sight, can be termed bhakti initiation. It is a state of mind in which the emotions of the disciple are fully in tune with the feelings of the guru. Just the power conveyed through the glimpse is enough to explode the emotions and make one aware of the spiritual energy.

The third form of initiation is due to concentration of mind from the side of the disciple and thought initiation from the side of the guru. This generally happens when the dissipations of mind have stopped. There is no distraction in thought, feeling or emotion. The whole mental and subtle personality is in tune with the guru's personality. There is interaction and harmony between the guru's personality and the disciple's personality. Thought transmission awakens the energies of the subtle and causal bodies, and provides purification of the samskaras. This purification of the samskaras in turn leads to the experience of inner light.

The fourth form of initiation is by psychic transmission. Up to the third stage, contact between guru and disciple is required. In the fourth stage, however, the guru and disciple can be miles apart, but there is absolutely no distinction

between them. With this type of psychic initiation, a form of transmission takes place which only happens in a state of perfect unity. This stage is known as ecstasy in spiritual and religious language, because there is total fusion of body, mind and spirit.

We hear of many saints in Christianity in whose body stigmata appeared when they were in ecstasy. In that stage, holes appear and blood begins to flow; pain is also experienced. It becomes a very physical experience. After one comes out of this stage of identification, the wounds of the body begin to heal. That type of transmission between guru and disciple, God and man, is a very different kind of transmission which takes place on the deepest realms of the psychic personality, beyond mind and beyond ego. It is the fusion of two spirits. In the previous few stages it was fusion of mind and heart, but in the final stage it is fusion of spirit.

Can disease be helpful on the spiritual path?

Disease in general represents an imbalance in the physiological and psychological structure. That is the common explanation of 'disease'. When body and mind are not at ease, then there is dis-ease. When they are not at ease that means there is a type of disturbance, conflict or imbalance. With a diseased body, mind or personality it is not possible to progress in spiritual life. Therefore, in all spiritual traditions, it has been emphasized that the body be maintained in a healthy condition.

There is a saying in Sanskrit: *sharira madhyama khalu dharma sadhanam* – "It is only through the body that one can experience inner spiritual commitment." Therefore, the whole structure of spirituality has been devised with the aim to purify and balance the energies and activities of the body and mind. With a healthy body and mind one can go very far in spiritual life. Initially, they are very important.

There comes a time, however, when you transcend the needs of body and mind and begin to identify with your

spiritual nature. Then body and mind become unimportant. I can give you the example of Swami Sivananda. He made very strict rules for physical health and followed them till he transcended body awareness. The moment he transcended body awareness, external mind awareness, he neglected the requirements of body and mind.

Externally, this creates a conflict in the minds of those still attached to the worldly plane, they ask, “Why does this man not practise what he preaches so he does not fall sick?” But for people like Swami Sivananda this is a different state of experience. They use their car to go from one place to the next. After reaching their destination they get out of the car and leave it lying in the sun, wind and rain. Why should we expect them to wash and oil the car when it is not even going to be used?

Ramakrishna Paramahansa suffered from cancer. People used to ask him, “Why can you not cure yourself?” He used to say, “Yes, I can cure myself, no doubt, with all my spiritual power. The Divine Mother can cure me if I ask Her, but then the *samskaras*, the *karmas*, the disease which I have taken upon myself will seek another outlet.” Similarly, you will find that most of the highly enlightened saints of this age have had some kind of physical disease. Some have diabetes, some have paralysis, some have cancer, and so on. We may wonder why, with all their spiritual attainments, they cannot burn everything up. It is very hard for the worldly to understand their mentality.

I remember once in 1978, during Sri Swamiji’s life at Sivanandashram, ex-Bihar School of Yoga, one swami had a very bad foot sore. It was really swollen and he was unable to walk. Sri Swamiji was on tour at that time. When he came back he saw the swami and the foot sore and said, “Do not worry, it will be all right.” Then a miracle happened! In twelve hours’ time, the whole thing disappeared from the swami’s foot and appeared on Sri Swamiji’s foot. We saw with our own eyes and there is no denying it.

For us, it was a horrible experience. He could not walk. In order for him to move from one room to the other, four swamis had to lift and carry him. He continued giving lectures and went on tours with swamis carrying him. This lasted for many months.

Once I gathered enough courage to go and ask him what was happening with his foot. He said, "It is not physical; let it come out this way. No medicine, no ointment, no bandage, nothing." Then I realized that he must have taken upon himself a karma, or something which was manifesting in that swami, which he, as a guru, had to bear for many years. The swami was perfectly all right after twelve hours, there was no sign of any foot problem any more. Since many of us saw this with our own eyes, we believe that after reaching a certain spiritual height, these things are possible.

Many times I feel that such people do not want to get rid of those accumulated karmas, which are manifesting in the form of physical disease. I feel that this is the only way they can keep in touch with the external worldly reality. If that pain and suffering were not there, they would not be here. It is like a hot-air balloon trying to fly away with one rope holding it to the ground. While they have to live and work with the body in the world, they have to use disease as an anchor. If not, they would not belong to this world at all. After that all the swamis were very afraid to mention they were having this pain or that pain.

For realized people, disease is necessary, it naturally and spontaneously manifests. I feel it is an integral part of their lives. However, as a sadhaka it is imperative that one has a disease-free body and mind.

**How can one achieve inner communication with the guru?
Does one have to achieve very high states of meditation?**

Proficiency in meditation is needed, but more than that, purity of heart is required. If that purity is within you, then that itself will take you to a meditative state beyond the common concepts of meditation. The feeling of purity will

generate one-pointedness and total identification with guru or God.

To obtain purity is not difficult. For that you will have to follow the three basic disciplines: devotion, austerity and renunciation. When these three disciplines are combined in one lifestyle, awareness of the inner guru can take place.

There are many people who go deep into meditation without having attained purity. They have certain experiences which they cannot have derived from a source other than their own minds.

However, meditation is simply a process of introversion. Through meditation you can go deep into your mind and consciousness. The deeper you go, the harder it is to recognize the true experience from the false experience, because awareness decreases as you go deep. Inner purity increases the awareness by making you observe the aspect of attachments, limitations, conflicts and abilities, and that gives a greater sense of attainment.

There are two processes: one of 'becoming' and the other of 'being'. In the path of becoming we go through various stages of cognition, experience and concentration. In the state of being there is identification. You can observe a tree and suddenly lose body consciousness and become the tree. It is a very frightening experience if the body, mind and cognition are not ready for it.

Once, something similar happened to me. I was in a retreat, just enjoying myself and relaxing in the beauty and shade of the forest. Suddenly, I went very deep inside, introverted. I do not recollect what I was doing at that time, whether walking, sitting or lying down. I lost body awareness and felt as if I had become a tree. I could feel the roots, the trunk, the leaves, and the movement of the wind through my branches. I could feel the solidity of the trunk, the fragility of the small twigs and branches.

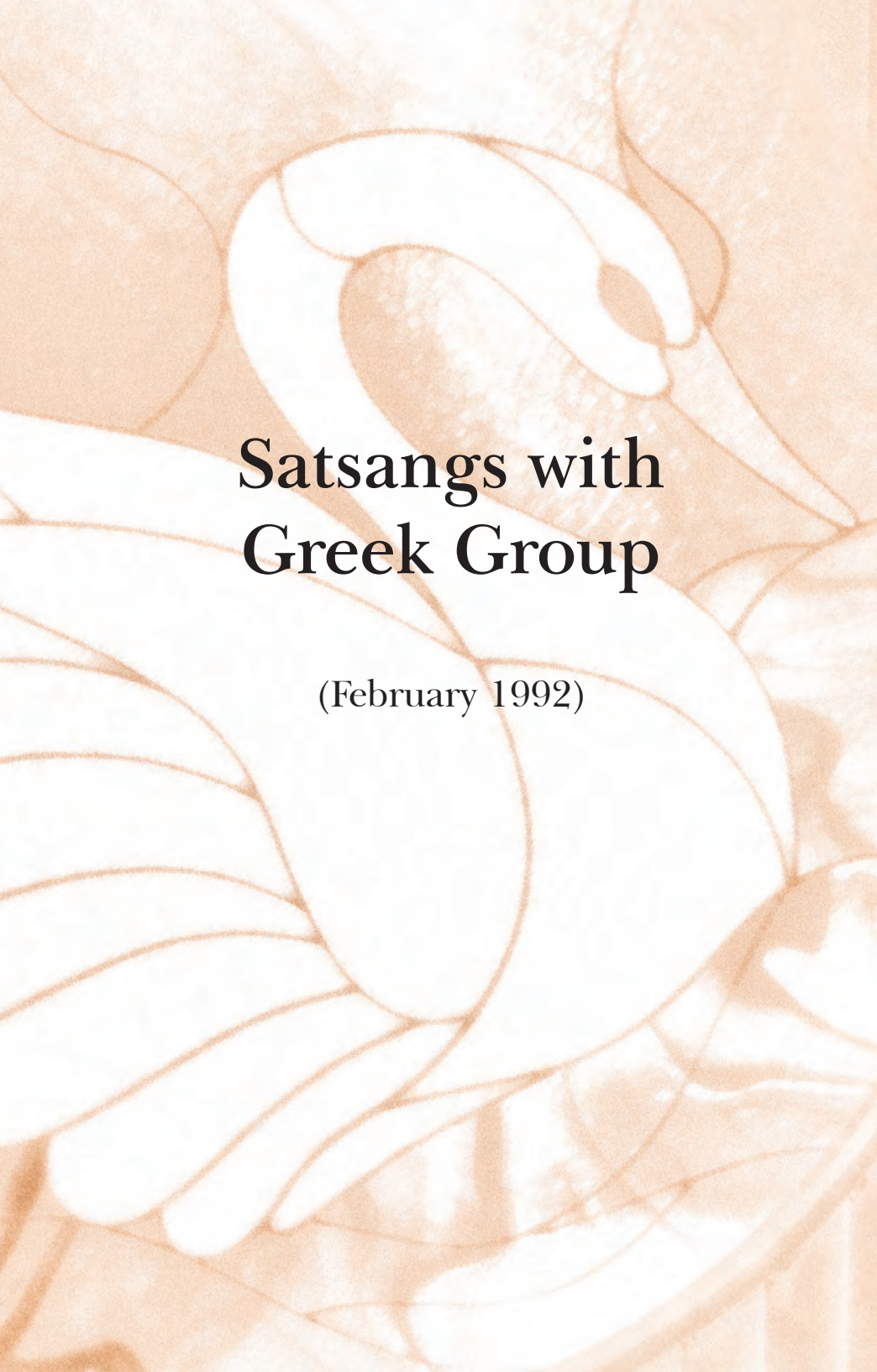
For one moment it was a very horrible experience, because it was different from what I was normally used to. Very unpleasant sensations were running down my body.

Then I thought that I should watch it; separate the cognitive faculty from that experience. When I tried doing that I found myself back in my body. When I returned to normal consciousness I found that all the hairs on my body were standing up, as it happens in a state of fright. Cold and warm sensations were felt in the body, and it was trembling.

When I reflect on this experience I feel that something happened then which gave me a glimpse of total unification or identification with the object of concentration. At that moment, with the loss of body and mind awareness, even the ego is dissolved. Such feelings I believe to be a glimpse of that identification. When there is inner purity then the process becomes much simpler.

If one identifies totally with the guru then one becomes the guru in every respect. The body or mind does not change, but the energy and inspiration become that of the guru. That is the merger or fusion with the guru which dwells inside. When this happens with a divine force, it is known as ecstasy; it is the divine will manifesting. Thus, purity is necessary.





Satsangs with Greek Group

(February 1992)



Many people in the garb of spiritual aspirants come to me seeking answers to questions about which they themselves have no concept.

One such aspirant appeared one day and asked me, “Can all people attain liberation or moksha, and if they can, why do they not attain it?” I told him to go around the town and ask everyone whether they wanted liberation or something else.

In the evening that aspirant returned with a list. Each person he had asked had wanted something different: name, fame, wealth, recognition, status, offspring, marriage, etc. I said, “Now you know what people want. Who wants liberation? The potential of liberation is there in every individual, but they have to be aware of it. Right now they are all showing their backs to it.”

Every individual can be liberated, just as every seed can be sprouted with proper care. We consider liberation to be a possibility, but we are unable to convert it into reality.

I know only one thing: that a seed can easily become a plant or a giant tree. It is not hard for such a transformation to take place. What is required is understanding of the process and the ability to desire liberation from the depths of one’s inner being.

*Sprouts are born when the seed dies.
Freedom is revealed when the ‘I’ dies.*

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

To achieve purity does one first have to know the whole content of the mind?

No, it is not necessary. As you progress you come upon different areas and you learn to deal with them at that moment. It is just like driving on the road. Whenever you see another car or any turns coming up, you tackle them at that moment. Automatically the accelerator is released, the break is applied, the gears are changed; it happens spontaneously when you know the process of driving.

In the same way, when the vehicle of sadhana becomes known to you then you can deal with situations and experiences as and when they arise. It is not necessary to have a map of the mind to know where the turns and danger points are. Proficiency in sadhana is a must for this.

When a person is following the path of yoga as a karma sannyasin and gradually becomes more removed from the family members, is it right for them to continue their sadhana and pursue the path even though the family is feeling the pain?

First of all, I do not think that karma sannyasa or yoga practice can create differences in the family, because if they create a distance then their main aim, which is harmony in the environment, is lost. Yoga, the attitude of karma sannyasa

and sadhana should not create distance within the family. However, something else happens.

When one begins to practise yoga or perform sadhana then one becomes more sensitive to others' feelings and to the environment. Situations and environments which seemed very pleasant a few years ago suddenly seem to be very destructive, baseless, and distracting. Thus, it is the grace of sensitivity which makes one rebel against those distracting situations. A feeling of intense dislike is generated and one wants to remain alone in the experience which one has gained through yoga.

Initially, one should try to observe that sensitivity. Rather than trying to adjust the sadhana or yoga program, it is advisable to channel that sensitive manifestation of emotion. Effort has to be made in certain directions in order to maintain the external harmony within the family, and our internal balance. In order to maintain inner balance it is necessary for us to practise self-observation, concentration of mind and repetition of mantra, that is, the practices of antar mouna, trataka and japa. On the external field one should try to maintain the natural front, but with awareness of sensitivity. Try to explain the personal feeling of sensitivity when the family members are more receptive to listening.

So, one important sadhana for a yogi or karma sannyasin is to have the ability to stand in someone else's shoes in order to understand them. If you stand in your own shoes and try to kick somebody you will also get hurt. It is better to stand in someone else's shoes, understand their viewpoint and see how you can adapt that viewpoint in order to be able to maintain harmony at all levels. The physical, mental, emotional and intellectual interaction has to be observed from both sides. The aims and ambitions of the whole family must be kept in view.

Sri Swamiji's own family was a multicultural one. His father was a Hindu traditionalist and very strict. His mother was a revolutionary. He himself was a sannyasin and his younger brother was a Buddhist. They were all living under

the same roof, and you can imagine what type of family problems they used to have. So, just compare your problems with his!

In the course of time, a basic understanding about each other develops. When people begin to respect the sensitive nature and desires of each member in the family, then family life becomes very full. It is not necessary to support what someone is doing, but it is necessary to respect what another person is trying to do. One should try to awaken that sense of respect in the other members of the family by trying to understand their sensitivity, their likes, dislikes and ambitions. You can find a way to maintain that harmony by the practice of *trataka*, *antar mouna* and *japa*.

What kind of tapasya is suitable for different types of people?

There are many types of tapasya, but the most common division of tapasya is sattvic, rajasic and tamasic. For yogic-minded people sattvic tapasya is the most useful. In this form of tapasya the process used is a meditative one of self-observation and self-purification. The practices of *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana* form part of sattvic tapasya, and the attitude changes at the time of practice.

When we practise *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana* with the purpose of meditation then we tend to seek new experiences. We have the awareness that there is a goal which we want to achieve. If we practise *antar mouna* with that idea in mind then our ultimate purpose is to stop the chattering of the mind. If we practise any other form of meditative technique our ultimate purpose is to go deep into the mind, and by doing so, to recognize the source of our being.

However, when the meditative practices of sattvic tapasya are performed, there is a sense of self-observation without any further expectation. Self-observation gives birth to a state of inner transformation, and when this state is being experienced, shedding of the old limiting ideas and concepts takes place. That shedding is the most important aspect

of tapasya. The ability to drop the negative tendencies, expressions and samskaras is the actual meaning of tapasya. This tapasya ultimately leads to awakening of cosmic love.

It is human nature to experience love. Hatred is an implanted idea; love is never implanted, it is spontaneous. People generally imbibe negative emotions because certain ideas have been implanted by the family, society, their culture and the world in general. Love and compassion, on the other hand, come spontaneously. When the implanted concepts are removed from the personality then the real sense of tapasya is achieved. That austerity then gives birth to natural freedom, love, compassion, affection, which is the culmination of tapasya.

Observation without any expectation is the first step in tapasya.

Is renunciation a condition for spiritual development?

It depends on what kind of a spiritual aim you have in front of you. For the final spiritual attainment, renunciation is a condition, but the urge towards renunciation will be natural and spontaneous. You will not have to try from your side. Renunciation will be the result of your having achieved mastery over the normal tendencies and faculties of the mind.

However, in order to reach that level of renunciation you have to come to the stage where Sri Swamiji is now. For you or me, it is a very far-fetched idea at present, because actual renunciation only takes place when all karmas and samskaras have been exhausted. As long as we are under their influence, as long as we have to fulfil certain roles and obligations, renunciation begins with superficial awareness.

Gradually, when there is recognition of the mind and personality, we can identify areas which need to be purified, left behind or totally neglected so that in the last stage there is a well-established self-identity and awareness. Then renunciation will take place.

When is it time for a karma sannyasin to become a full sannyasin?

There are certain things which one has to keep in mind, although we do not believe that there is a specific time to progress from one stage to another. The only condition is that initially the urge, motivation and desire have to be there. Later on, there should be commitment. It should not happen the other way around.

There are many people who say they want full sannyasa, take it, and after a few years want to get married and take karma sannyasa. That is a reversal of the process. So one should have a clear direction in life and know what one is aspiring for.

When the sense of commitment is strong, and you know that your direction is not going to change in the future, that your motivation and commitment will always be the same, it is possible to take full sannyasa. As a preparation, a karma sannyasin can try to have a clear concept about their future, keeping in view the social context and the family environment.

Can you speak to us about some of your early experiences with Sri Swamiji?

That is very difficult. I have tried many times to speak about it but I never can, because whenever I think of him my mind goes blank. I have lived with him in many different capacities and in many different roles. At one stage of my life I used to look upon him as my father and mother. At another I looked upon him as my guru. At yet another stage I found him to be my closest friend. However, looking back, I now feel all these ideas and identities were falsely created by me according to my particular need at different times.

Today I feel very strongly that he has always been an inspiration deep inside me. His force and inspiration have lifted me up whenever I have fallen down. His inspiration has always supported me whenever I have lagged behind. There have been times when I used to play in his lap. There

have been times when I used to wrestle with him and kick him and tickle him and bite him. So, looking back, I feel that I cannot really find the words for everything that has happened.

For me, he was always an inspiration, no matter in which role I looked at him. If I say that I had such and such experiences with him I will be trying to find words to describe a state of inspiration. I always become blocked whenever I have to talk about him, because experiences with a paramahansa cannot really be described through words.

Please speak to us about jignasu sannyasa. How was it conceived and how does it relate to poorna and karma sannyasa?

Sri Swamiji initiated hundreds and hundreds of people into the two systems of karma sannyasa and poorna sannyasa. Many times, people, without any previous preparation from their side, used to be inspired to commit themselves to sannyasa. Often the question used to come to our minds, “Why is he initiating people left, right and centre?” He used to say, “Look, a person can have a thousand faults and only one good quality. If I see that one quality in anybody I will try to encourage them to develop that quality, and forget about all the thousand faults. If people accept my help to awaken that one quality, then I have succeeded.” So he had his system of karma sannyasa and poorna sannyasa.

When the ball fell in my court, then I had to rethink, because the word *sannyasa* has now become a common identity, a common name which means aspirant of the spiritual path. I do not think I have the ability to look for that one positive quality in people like Sri Swamiji had. Right now, I see all the thousand bad ones. Maybe my perception and ideas will change later on, but right now I wish to make them aware of the direction in which they want to go.

Jignasu sannyasa was the first initiation into sannyasa. Here an initiate is not given geru, but white or yellow. They have to find a spiritual base. That can be done by practising

yoga, by coming to ashrams, by performing some kind of social work, and by developing their inner awareness. There are many people who only require that much in life, because of their social and cultural background.

Out of these, those who wish to progress further into the sannyasa system and commit themselves to sannyasa are given karma sannyasa. After they have fulfilled all their obligations and commitments, they are given poorna sannyasa. At each level of sannyasa an in-depth awareness of the self has to be generated, at each level awareness about one's inherent qualities must develop. So, from seed manifestation of the desire for jignasu sannyasa, to the flowering state of perfection in poorna sannyasa, there is gradual perfection.

Of course, not everybody qualifies for karma sannyasa. Many people may want karma sannyasa, but when they come I give them jignasu sannyasa, according to my perception of how they commit themselves to the sannyasa ideals. So it is an ongoing process.

There are many people who wish to take karma sannyasa, but are only given a spiritual name, because at that moment they may want something because of the flow of emotion, which may not necessarily be right for them at a later stage. Generally what happens is that when people take full or *poorna* sannyasa they feel that they have instantaneously become free from any kind of social norms and rules. They express their freedom in the marketplace and do the same things which they would normally do, but under the pretext of sannyasa, "Now I can have whiskey and champagne. Previously I used to do it because it was my habit, but now I am doing it because I am a sannyasin and I have to observe myself." So only the attitude changes; actions do not. That kind of lopsided expression of freedom is developed by the sannyasins who have no training or background.

So, from an organizational and traditional point of view, control is necessary, because lack of it degrades the name of the tradition, guru and organization. If you go in geru to any

pub and people ask you, “Who are you?” and you say, “I am a sannyasin.” “Where are you coming from?” “Bihar School of Yoga.” “Who is your guru?” “Swami Satyananda.” “What are you doing here?” “I am going to have a glass of whiskey”, what kind of impression will a normal person have about the sannyasa tradition and commitment?

Therefore, in order to maintain the sannyasa tradition and create an awareness of the sanctity of sannyasa, the various systems have been formed. More systems will eventually come out: rishi sannyasa, for a whole household to lead the sannyasa kind of life, jnana sannyasa, vidvat sannyasa, and vividesha sannyasa. In the sannyasa tradition there are seven categories. Each system will provide fulfilment of a particular area of life.

Please talk to us about the meaning of attachment and detachment.

Attachment and detachment are the two realities of life. As long as we have an individual mind and personality we cannot escape from them, because they are manifestations of the mind which can only be transcended when we transcend the mind.

The nature of fire is to burn; that of water is to flow constantly; wind cannot be still. They have their movement and are controlled by their inherent nature. In the same way, the mind is influenced by its own nature. Yoga considers these two aspects of attachment and detachment to be forces controlling the mind on the gross level.

Whether or not we consider thoughts, emotions or intellect to be mind, it is their nature to feel attraction and repulsion. In yoga, the concept of individuality itself is the result of attraction, where the transcendental, unmanifest form of energy is attracted towards gross, material manifestation. This attraction is experienced in our life by our emotions and thoughts. Why are we attracted to something or somebody? We are attracted because of the concept of individuality and the creation of an emotional

link, because we have our likes for some things, for pleasures. Wherever there is sensory and sensual experience there is bound to be attraction, which manifests in a very material way.

We feel thirsty and we go for water. Thirst is a concept and experience of the body and senses, recognized by the mind for the simple reason that its quenching gives a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction. This idea of thirst cannot be quenched by food, because food has not been accepted by the mind as an agent for quenching thirst. There is mental recognition of the nature of various experiences, but when that recognition is not there, repulsion is experienced. For a person who is in the desert dying of thirst, water is more important than finding a mine of gold. This is the nature of the mind which is controlled by the cosmic nature.

Such experiences will not lead to a transcendental experience. Therefore, in yoga the concept of *vairagya* or detachment has been included. This enables one to observe the qualities and tendencies of the mind, and to act according to proper judgement, knowing the limitations and pitfalls of every experience of nature.

There is a way to convert attachment into spiritual force: the external flow of awareness and energy are made to go inwards. When consciousness and energy move together in an outward direction, manifestation of the mind and mental experiences takes place. By making these two forces flow inwards one can transcend attachment, by developing sharp concentration, awareness and faith.

The only tool which can convert attachment into transcendental force is faith, and to experience the energy in a state of intense faith, concentration is required. Through concentration, making the mind one-pointed either on an external object such as guru or an idea such as God, we can ultimately awaken the faith which will lead us to surrender.

This surrender will help us drop the old understanding of the mind and its nature, give a new identity and experience of the mind beyond the senses, reverse the

flow of energy and consciousness, and fuse normal external attachment with a transcendental idea. Hence, concentration becomes a tool to attain faith. The intensity of faith is experienced in the state of surrender. Surrender pulls the mind away from gross experiences and links it to the divine experience.

In this way, attachment can be a form of spiritual evolution. That same attachment that we feel externally can be felt internally for God and guru, and can give the experience of the highest transcendental reality. Attachment is a state of plugging the individuality in with the external world, and detachment is the process of unplugging it and putting it into another socket beyond mind and senses.

Please talk to us about karma. I do not think it is fair that a man who was brought up with the idea that his highest duty was to kill enemies and defend his country has to pay for it in another life.

It is very difficult to explain the rules that govern karma, but the answer is given in this very question. You cannot understand karma because you are brought up with an idea, whether it is to kill the enemy, to do something good for society, to become a soldier or a sannyasin, a saint or politician. Your external mind is ruled by concepts and ideas which developed and shaped your life along the way. The ideas which have been implanted in you alter your actions.

However, it is not the idea which creates karma, but the action which follows the idea. Action is a combination of two things: the first is the motivation from your side and the second is the result. I can think of killing somebody but that will not create karma for me. I can think it throughout my life and still be free from the karma, because I have not put that idea into an action which will give me a particular result. It is only when the action is carried through that a karma becomes visible.

Therefore, *karma* has been translated as the law of cause and effect, and has never been considered to be just a plain

action, neither the cause nor the effect. Rather, it is the law of cause and effect. When we are motivated by an idea, and that idea is followed by an action, then this action involves many different areas of our personality. God is involved; intellect, emotion and feeling are involved. Consciously or unconsciously it creates a particular transformation in the inner personality.

I firmly believe that hatred is not the nature of man. The nature of humanity is only to love. Hatred, jealousy and other such negative results are imbibed. One does not have to teach me how to love, because loving is my nature, but one can teach me how to hate. That is not my nature. One can teach me how to dislike something by implanting certain ideas in me, creating the concept of right and wrong, bringing my individuality to the surface and stimulating the areas of my attachments and sense of security. That is how we are taught to hate and dislike, but it is not our real nature.

In my opinion, a person never performs a bad karma. Bad karmas are the results of such indoctrination and implanting of ideas which limit our vision. This limiting of vision can take one to any extent: even to suicide, like the suicide squads, the kamikazes. Do you think that they had no love for their lives, friends and families? They were, however, motivated to such a high degree that, in order to preserve the interest of a few, they killed themselves. People talk of spiritual brainwashing, but I think that society brainwashes humanity to the greatest and fullest extent possible. This system of brainwashing goes so deep into our education, culture, lifestyle and society that it is impossible to escape it.

The motivated actions cause the negative effects of the karmas in that they alter our perception, emotion, feeling and thought. I will give you an example. If an ant is just in front of me I will not have the desire to squash it, but if it bites my leg my hand will automatically squash it. It is the nature of the ant to bite, but why did I react in this way? When that ant bit my leg something happened inside me.

The body experienced pain which disturbed my concept of sensory pleasure. I reacted to that loss of physical comfort; it created a burst of anger inside me. What was it that altered my natural harmony? My sense of physical comfort. I do not want physical discomfort, I want physical comfort. Externally, a person would just see my hand go down, a dead ant, the hand picking up the ant and throwing it, but if you study that particular motion from all angles you will see a thought, a feeling attached to it. If you go to the source of that thought and feeling, you will also find the sense of self-security.

If you look at such an action from all angles and see that it has altered your natural frame of being, then that action will take the form of a karma which you will have to pay back in the course of time. It is not necessary for you to become an insect in your next life and for the ant to become human and come to kill you, but you will also feel the same intensity of pain and suffering via some particular event, twist or turn.

If you have the thought to react in a certain way to a certain situation, you are simply fulfilling that programming. Our life is programmed in just the same way as a computer. With the action and transformation of the inner personality there has to be a return payment. It is not known to anybody what shape karma will take. It is not necessary that you have to wait to pay for the killing of your enemies in your next life; you may do it even in this life through suffering, by taking upon yourself the pain inflicted on others. That suffering could take the form of a lethal physical disease or mental anxiety or depression. That payment can also be in the form of a total change in your normal lifestyle. How one pays the karmas is not known to anybody.

It is only through the practice of meditation that you can recognize the karmas, and with that comes an understanding of how you can deal with them. That meditation has to be enjoined with a positive attitude and action. There are definite ways to realize your karmas and samskaras and to see them just as you see a movie, but none of those practices have yet

been taught to anybody because very few are prepared to handle such experiences and events. Maybe with the global awakening of consciousness those practices will become available, and if they do then you do not have to worry about paying for the karmas in your next life. Yoga is moving into the plastic money, credit card direction; you spend now and the bank will take the money from you. That bank is your own inner self. Externally you may do anything you wish to do, but internally you will have to be ready to pay the price.

I will give you one example. Many of you have heard of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the knowledge which Krishna imparted to his warrior disciple, Arjuna, on the battlefield. Arjuna was a soldier. In the war that he was going to fight, millions were going to die. On the eve of the battle he had a nervous breakdown. These thoughts came to his mind, “Why kill? What is happening? Why should I do it?” “Imagine all the negative karmas being accumulated!” At that moment Krishna instructed Arjuna in a practical and philosophical system to neutralize the effect of karmas and that would allow an individual to perform their duties with the utmost efficiency. Arjuna followed the teachings of Krishna.

The practical instructions were hidden in the philosophical discussion that took place between them. For many people, the *Bhagavad Gita* is simply a nice book which gives an understanding of different spiritual aspects of life. What people fail to see is the practical aspect hidden within the philosophical discussion. If you can discover that practical aspect you do not have to worry about the karmas at all.

What is the purpose of arohana and avarohana in kriya yoga?

There are certain practices of kriya yoga which involve external consciousness and internal awareness. In order to have the experience of both states, the mind has to do some gymnastics.

In kriya yoga, the front of the body represents the external consciousness, something that we can perceive. The back of the body symbolically represents the inner state of

consciousness which we cannot perceive, but which we know is there. Physically we cannot see our own back; we can see the trunk, stomach, the whole frontal body, and so it is with visualization. When we try to observe something mentally it is seen in the space between the eyebrows, i.e. in the front of the body. It is very hard to reverse the visual concept and try to see something inside.

In order to experience both states, there are certain practices where the awareness travels up the front of the body to a particular point, then goes inside and down through the spine, then again up the front of the body and down through the spine, creating the figure of eight. This is mental training for becoming aware of the external and internal experiences at the same time. The mind should not be conditioned to observe just one state, either that of extroversion or introversion, but both.

Many times we have difficulties in our sadhana because of this. Some inner experience takes place, but we are unable to understand it because we are extroverted. Or, conversely, some physical sensations begin, like tingling or a feeling as if ants are crawling inside the body, which we cannot understand because we do not know what is happening to us on the physical plane. Normally, when we are inside we become oblivious to the external sensory experiences. This creates a split in the whole of physical, mental and pranic experience. Thus, the purpose of arohana and avarohana is to create an integrated experience and awareness.

Some aspirants, especially in the West, become attached to Sri Swamiji's disciples and mistakenly consider them as their gurus. This often leads them to confusion. Can you clarify what Sri Swamiji's role is, what is the role of western swamis and what is your role?

For me and many other disciples of Sri Swamiji he is not just a guru with a physical body, but is inspiration itself. I have felt him to be an inspiration, helping me to get up every time I fell down.

There is definitely a link between a teacher and a student, and it is very natural for people to come to love somebody they know and respect and who has helped them. It is like a patient-doctor relationship, but it goes much deeper than that.

Sannyasin disciples of Sri Swamiji carry his energy. They are wires through which the electrical current flows, and you can connect with any wire, it does not matter which, because it is his energy which will be flowing constantly through it.

Sri Swamiji, as a person, has a role to play. His physical body has a role to play; his spiritual aspiration has a role to play. These roles have so far been played out for the benefit of disciples all over the world. We are carriers of his spiritual role and we have no control over his physical role.

Personally, I feel very proud to be a disciple of someone who has never lost sight of his vision. Even if I were not his disciple I would still feel proud of having known a person who has such a crystal clear direction to his life.

When he took sannyasa, it was not in his mind at all to have ashrams and disciples. The only aim was to attain realization. He perfected his sadhana and himself, and in order to overcome the last barrier of karmas he played out his ashram role. While he established the ashram, he inspired and encouraged thousands of people to take to the yogic and spiritual path.

Despite every kind of attainment in his social, external and spiritual life, he kept the spiritual flame alive within himself and did not allow the comfort and luxury to overshadow the inspiration he had as a young boy. When he reached the age of sixty-five, a time when people need security and ease, he left behind all the comforts and luxuries that the ashram could provide and the love and affection that his disciples could give. His sankalpa became: "I will not accept any help from people whom I came to know after I established this centre."

When he left the ashram, he had only two dhotis and one hundred and eight rupees in his bag. These were all

his possessions, nothing more. No one knew he was leaving, except me. I had a lot of fights with him whenever I tried to organize his stay at different places, he refused all help. He said, "My role as guru is over with my departure from the ashram. Now I will just roam freely without any disciple following me, without anybody knowing me. If I die, nobody will know that I have died. When I die it will not be on a hospital bed surrounded by disciples, but with the sky for my blanket and the earth for my mattress. Then I shall remember no disciple whom I knew in my life. I shall only remember Shiva."

On the day he took what I consider an impossible step for an average person, even for a guru, he established the real ideal of sannyasa. When I finish my role here, this is the path I wish to follow. Others can have their ashrams and their disciples and die in their ashrams.

Sri Swamiji has inspired a sense of commitment within us to the mission and he told us very strictly, "Do not even think of me when I am not here." We, however, continue to do so, just like the son asking the father, "If you were going to die anyway why did you give me birth?" That is how we disciples act with the guru, asking him, "Why did you make us your disciples if you were going to leave one day?" But that is a very limited idea.

Sri Swamiji often made it clear that there are people who are in a position to direct an ashram, but that the spiritual successor of a guru is only and can only be one. There cannot be two or three. His ideas are very clear in terms of the roles directors and people in charge of other centres and sannyasin disciples have to play, and what their connection has to be with the Bihar School of Yoga and also with his spiritual successor.

Everything in the Munger ashram is his creation. Every tree that you see was planted by him; you can experience his touch and compassion in it. Whenever you visit the ashram just open yourself to the experience of this energy. That in itself will give you a clear direction in life.

Since Sri Swamiji says that he does not want to be disturbed, is it a disturbance when someone thinks of him in meditation?

No, not at all. If you could tune into his frequency then it might be a disturbance, but if you just turn your radio on you do not really know which wave you are picking up. In fact, he should remain his disciple's ishta devata. That is why I say to everybody I initiate that I am just a medium. He is your actual guru and teacher.

Is it possible to eliminate part of our past karma through positive thoughts and right action?

Yes, it is possible. There are different ways to realize one's karmas and eliminate them. The easiest, but also the longest method, is through meditation. Meditation allows one to go very deep within oneself, to pass the areas of the mind which are controlled by intellect, and reach the source from where the experiences of life, desires, actions and ambitions manifest. Using the process of observation, elimination of duality, it is possible to observe the karmas. By understanding the cause of their manifestation, one can work with the cause and eliminate the manifest karma.

This requires a great degree of perfection from the side of the aspirant. 'Perfection' here means the ability to observe and understand the effect of the karmas in the right context; not just from the individual point of view but also from the universal viewpoint. Through a process of discrimination it is possible to remove their ill-effects by modification of thought, behaviour and action. It is a very long path which requires good understanding of one's own personality, desires and other mental archetypes. Only then can meditation act as a tool towards transcending the karmas.

Another method is through the awakening of bhakti. Although bhakti is generally translated as 'devotion' it does not really mean devotion. *Bhakti* is a state, and not a process, where unity has taken place between the individual identity and the universal identity. To attain this state,

various techniques are utilized: mantras form one technique; remembrance of the divine is another. These techniques infuse the personality with the sense of identification with a quality which is transcendental and divine.

When the personality is permeated with awareness of this transcendental quality, then the four aspects of mind are transcended. The four aspects of mind are *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*. *Manas* is the thinking principle, *buddhi* is the intellect, *chitta* is the deeper aspect of the thinking process and intellect and *ahamkara* is the ego-principle. These four aspects are transcended with the attainment of bhakti.

Karmas manifest because of blockages and distractions in these four aspects of the mind. Karmas are like seeds, which, if they receive proper air, sun and water will germinate. Fertilizer, air, water and sun, these are the four qualities of the mind: *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*. Earth is the individual personality where karmas are sown. Therefore, when you actually attain the seed-state by going beyond the four aspects of the mind, they are made 'energy-less'. In the absence of the right type of manure, water, sun, warmth and air, they do not germinate, but die.

To attain the state of bhakti is not easy, as it requires determined effort and awareness on the part of the aspirant. Bhakti is not just a technique for feeling good vibrations, but a state where duality is transcended.

The third process for those who cannot go very deep within themselves is integrating the aspects of viveka, vairagya and positive actions in the normal lifestyle. *Viveka* means right understanding. Right understanding will create a positive result in the personality by providing a new dimension to one's understanding and interaction with the world, the senses and objects. Proper application of viveka alters our behaviour, desires and interaction.

Vairagya, non-attachment, is another important element. Attainment of vairagya will help an individual rise above attachment and detachment, by maintaining a harmonious

equilibrium. The moment we rise above the normal manifestations of the mind, which come in the form of attraction and repulsion, our inner personality and perception changes. There will be greater awareness between the external action and the inner motivation. This is important if we are to understand and realize our karmas.

Fourth, is the external aspect where creative action is being taken by the agents of the body and the mind. If and when this happens, karmas can be understood, purified and transcended to a great degree.

Please tell us how to control our desires.

Desire is one thing which can never be controlled. There are different kinds of desires which manifest according to the strengths and weaknesses of each individual. There are physical desires, social desires and mental desires which must be fulfilled in order to create a sense of security. There are emotional desires that need to be fulfilled. There are psychic desires in the dimension of the chakras and kundalini, and there are spiritual desires.

Desires represent an urge to attain something and are generally related to our life of sensory and sensual pleasure. Generally they represent the fulfilment of the need for security. It is very difficult to transcend them through the practices of yoga. Even in the last stage of samadhi desire still exists; even God has desire! If he could not transcend it, how can we? God had the desire to create and look at all the mess He has made. The whole world is His creation and it is in a big mess!

In yoga it is said that once you are on the path of yoga or realization you have to leave desire and wish fulfilment aside, whether it is physical, social, external, internal or spiritual, and live in the present without having any expectation. To become desire-less is difficult, but it is possible to live in the present without any expectation. This will provide an understanding of how desires shape and guide our life and destiny.

Finally, it is through the process of sadhana that we can reach a shunya state beyond desire. Desires are passing scenes on the road to *moksha*, liberation. You cannot remove or destroy them, but they can be left behind. Once you reach your destination they are not even remembered. They become like photographs you took along the way.

Is it an obstacle to our spiritual evolution if we sometimes prefer karma yoga to sadhana?

No, not at all. If you practise karma yoga with the real attitude of a karma yogi then you can still evolve spiritually without the need for any other practices. The same principle applies to jnana, bhakti, hatha, kriya or kundalini yoga. However, one has to remember that our personality is made up of different qualities. To awaken an aspect of the personality a certain technique is required, and each technique of yoga fulfils the requirements of a particular aspect of personality.

In psychology, personality is said to be of four types: dynamic, intellectual, emotional and psychic.

A person who is intellectual by nature will not be able to practise external karma yoga, because karma yoga activates the dynamic principles and aspects of the personality. Therefore, for an intellectual, the practices of jnana yoga are most suitable. For emotional personalities, the practices of bhakti yoga are best suited. For a psychic personality, the practices of raja kriya, kundalini and other yogas will be more useful. For a person with a dynamic tendency, the practices of karma and hatha yoga will be useful.

Do we know what the basic trait of our personality is? The personality is not defined according to how we act and behave externally. It is defined by traits that manifest in the course of our life at different times, and generally a human being is a combination of these four different types. Therefore, in order to have a basic understanding of ourselves we should practise a combination of techniques which can balance the various aspects of our personality.

It is only after many years of practice that our actual personality can be known. A person who appears to be dynamic by nature may not necessarily have a dynamic personality. A person who appears to be highly intellectual may not necessarily have an intellectual personality, because many traits which we project are imbibed from outside due to educational programming. Therefore, it is generally only a teacher or guru who, through experience, can understand the personality of the aspirant. We cannot really decide for ourselves what the right thing for us is, due to our lack of understanding and knowledge.

Can you tell us whether the guru chooses the disciple or the disciple chooses the guru?

That is something which I really do not know, because in my case he chose me. Normally it is the disciple who chooses the guru, because of their preconceived idea of what a guru should look like, and how he should live and behave. Gurus do not choose disciples. So you will have to answer this question yourselves.

Very few people can clap with one hand. In order to create a clapping sound, two hands are needed. So they both choose each other when they meet and when something clicks between them. It is 'love at first sight' and the guru-disciple relationship should prove to be an adventure.

Please tell us some of your experiences with Sri Swamiji.

This is one of the most difficult subjects and one which I rarely attempt to talk about, because for me he is not just within me in the form of experiences: he is me! That is enough for me. So I cannot talk to you about my experiences, but I can talk to you about him, for that has nothing to do with my experiences.

Most of the swamis, disciples, devotees or yoga students know of Sri Swamiji as a teacher or a guru. In my opinion, even that concept is only in their imagination, because who has lived with him long enough to know him? All the swamis who live abroad might have seen him once or twice in their

lifetime. They might have heard his lectures and said, "Oh he is a very nice fellow." They might have read his teachings and said, "He communicates the right thing." They have fleetingly seen the role of Sri Swamiji as being that of a speaker, teacher and administrator.

However, a few people have had the opportunity of seeing him in other roles. By observing these roles it is possible to see that he is neither a guru, nor a teacher, but a sadhaka, and his sadhanas have been multifarious. The results of these sadhanas, which have changed his life, can be perceived in his actions and thinking.

Sri Swamiji is not a man of many thoughts. The task which he was commanded by his guru and God to fulfil was the propagation of yoga. When he involved himself in the propagation of yoga he did so in the role of a yoga teacher. When he modified the age-old practices of yoga according to modern need, he adopted the role of a yoga exponent. When he inspired people to tread the spiritual path he became the inspirer, the guru. When he established the movement and the mission, he became an able administrator. These have been the roles which have been seen by everyone who has come into contact with him, either directly or indirectly through his teachings and disciples.

Other roles were to preserve the sanctity of the sannyasa tradition, to become a thinker of high calibre, to evolve his own social and global ideas. Several people are aware of these roles, others can imagine them, but only a few have actually understood them.

Sri Swamiji has also been aware of maintaining a spiritual tradition and has established a tradition which is alive. His tradition and mission are different. His tradition reflects the spirit which was infused into the few. It is the awareness of this tradition which has linked the present yogic age with the ancient spiritual age.

The ideals of sannyasa and spiritual life, the mantle of guru, belong to one person only. It is that spirit which is imbibed by the disciple that keeps the tradition alive. After

fulfilling the roles which his guru, Swami Sivananda had given him to fulfil, and after passing on the spiritual ideal, he renounced, and went into seclusion. In the world of sannyasa he stands alone as the true representative of spiritual life, because he never lost his inner clarity and vision.

Is the inner voice unmistakable? If so how can we train ourselves to hear it in all situations?

The inner voice is unmistakable, provided you know it is the real inner voice and not just hallucination or fantasy. Many times, due to our own hallucinations, our own superimposed ideas, we hear voices. We then mistake these voices for the inner voice, when they are not. At that time it is a process of hallucination. There is no question of training oneself to hear the inner voice in all situations. If you hear it, it represents a state of receptivity and purity in you. In that state of receptivity and purity you will be compelled to listen, to obey. The inner voice will then guide your every thought, feeling and action.

It is very similar to the state of normal emotions, love for example. When you love somebody and your heart goes out to that person there is no thinking, no rationality. You want to please that person in every way possible; you want to offer that person everything within your capabilities. At that time one does not think, “Am I doing the right thing or the wrong thing?” When an emotion is intense you are carried away by the force of it. This applies to love, hatred, anger, jealousy, and so forth.

It applies to the inner voice as well. You will not have the chance to think, “Is it the inner voice?” or “I wish it to happen at all times.” Only when one is hallucinating can these thoughts come. Hallucination is the result of an undirected, uncontrolled mind, while the inner voice is the symptom of a balanced, harmonious and realized mind. So keep on trying and maybe one day you will hear it.

To my knowledge there have been very few people in the history of humanity who have heard and followed

the guidance of the inner voice. They have attained it by constant practice, observation and self-analysis, and not by being carried away by one type of emotion. The practices for attaining purification and awareness all help the aspirant to transcend the mental limits and reach the inner dimension where these experiences become real. Of course, there has to be a need, a state where the urge for an experience becomes strong and powerful.

One is not hungry or thirsty all twenty-four hours of the day. The experiences of hunger and thirst happen because of a physiological condition. The desire to sleep is experienced when the mind and body reach a certain conditioned state of tiredness. Therefore, everything in life is governed by a particular state which one attains in the course of time. Things happen when the time is right; generally, there can be no quickening of the process. However, to quicken the process there must be conscious effort, gradual realization of all aspects of life, and integration of the various facets of our personality. Only then can the spiritual process be quickened, otherwise not.

In the history of humanity millions have thought about their spiritual life, but how many have attained spiritual realization? Very few! The desire for realization is not enough. There has to be a determined effort. You can develop the inner voice or any other state of spirituality and that awareness will provide the link between the individual and the divine.

Can you talk to us about the deep sense of freedom that enchants the seeker in the teaching and writing of Sri Swamiji?

Whatever Sri Swamiji has said, thought, taught and believed is not his intellectual speculation. He has experienced it. There is a world of difference between those who speculate intellectually and who propagate a system because of their own experience of it. When one describes something which one has experienced, it is a spontaneous description of a

process. That spontaneous expression is practical, something one can relate to in a very down-to-earth sense. It is this aspect which gives the feeling of clarity and freedom to Sri Swamiji's teachings and writings.

When a theory is just an intellectual speculation it does not mean anything except good words. You may enjoy reading and studying such speculative theories and appreciate them, but even after reading encyclopaedias of such teachings you will wonder where you stand. You will ask, "I have read so much, now what do I do? Where do I go from here?" That means that what you have studied or learnt is just the intellectual speculation of reality without understanding. There is no naturalness, no spontaneity. Sri Swamiji's teachings, however, reflect his own experiences, whether they are in relation to yoga, sadhana or worldly situations, and this is why the seeker receives such a deep sense of freedom.

When somebody meets his guru he feels very attracted to him and cannot resist, but on the other hand he feels that he has some obligations to fulfil.

In the guru-disciple relationship two main things stand out: one is the human individualistic relationship and the other is the inner, transcendental relationship. Most people are aware of the former relationship: liking the guru, wanting to be with them, but forming a split in their minds by thinking about the outside commitments also. This causes mental conflict which comes because of lack of clarity of mind. Thus, the first job of the guru is to clear this web of conflict from inside the mind of the disciple.

It is always the guru's effort to instil a sense of commitment within us towards life, which is based on common sense and necessity, because one cannot neglect external social and material life, and involve oneself fully in spiritual life alone. Sometimes this sense of commitment can take one physically away from the guru also. Then the inner link has to be awakened in order to feel the nearness of guru.

I will give you my own example. I joined Sri Swamiji at the tender age of four and left him at the age of ten. During the thirteen years I was away from him, I met him only about three times and that was only for a couple of days. In 1982 he came for a program to the United States. I was there at that time and he asked me if I would like to return to India. I asked him, "Are you asking me or ordering me?" He said, "I am asking you." So I said, "Well, since you've asked me, I will tell you my mind. I never want to return to India." He said, "Why?" I replied, "What will I do there? If I am near you, I lose you; if I am far from you, you're with me. However, one thing is also sure, if you instruct me to come there's no power on earth which will stop me." He left me and I went about my work.

On the 26th of December 1982, I received a telegram which said, "Be in India by 14th January." You know what the 26th of December is like: no tickets, all offices closed for Christmas and the New Year. I had just signed a contract for one hundred acres of land for the ashram a day before. Five ashrams were functioning in the US, which had developed within the course of two years. I closed all of them, packed my things, said "Hari Om", to everybody and left on the 12th of January, reaching here on the night of the 14th. People asked me, "What will happen to us if you leave?" I told them, "The man who sent me here will look after you, and the man who sent me here has called me; I cannot stay."

Within one week of having reached Munger, after having taken over the institution, Sri Swamiji said to me, "You wanted to be alone. Stay alone now, I am going on a tour to Australia." Now, imagine the problem! I had hardly been in India before; I could not even speak Hindi properly. I did not know the people or how things worked. This type of situation happens in the guru-disciple relationship, and if there is a sense of dedication and commitment, the external relationship with the guru is insignificant. The inner inspiration removes the problems of nearness, distance, physical guidance, guidance by correspondence. This is

how one has to live in spiritual life: with total surrender and awareness of external commitments. If there is total surrender from within, then even the external life is guided. Thus, one has to overcome the individualistic tendencies and be closely aware of the inner link.

Looking at the life of Sri Swamiji, it seems he has always been guided by some kind of instruction received from a higher source.

Yes, even from his early childhood he used to have spiritual experiences. He used to fall down unconscious when he was about four or five years old, and his family members used to think that he had epilepsy. However, when a sannyasin visited their home he told them it was not epilepsy but a state of yoga. They asked him what kind of state it was and he said it was samadhi; however, because he was just a child, his mind was still very immature, so it was manifesting in the form of unconsciousness.

At the age of twenty he became inspired to tread the spiritual path and search for a guru, which he found in the form of Swami Sivananda. With Swami Sivananda he learned and practised many things. Swami Sivananda also recognized that he was already an enlightened person. He gave only one instruction to Sri Swamiji: to work hard, that the light was already burning bright within him. He just had to remove the final veil over the light through karma yoga.

After leaving Rishikesh, Sri Swamiji travelled throughout the country as a wanderer. He came to the temple of his ishta devata in the western part of India, where he had a vision. In the vision he was told, “Go to Bihar and your mission will materialize.” He saw, as in a photograph, a big ashram. Later on he knew that he had seen a vision of Ganga Darshan. At that time he had no idea of opening an ashram, but led by that vision he came to Bihar.

In the early days, this hill used to be wild, a place frequented by robbers, thieves and murderers. Then, there was just an old cement platform where the Jyoti Mandir now

stands. Sri Swamiji used to sit there and do his sadhana. One day in 1958 while he was doing sadhana he felt as if an earthquake had come. He saw that platform split in half and a figure in white coming out from the ground. The figure said, "This will be the place of the yogic renaissance, and your slogan will be, 'Yoga is the culture of tomorrow'." From that time, the idea of establishing a yoga movement came to his mind.

Five years later, in 1963, at the age of forty, Sri Swamiji established the Bihar School of Yoga. His work here lasted twenty years, till 1983. It seems that his life was already programmed to function in 20-year periods: born in 1923, joined Swami Sivananda in 1943, established the ashram in 1963, and left the ashram in 1983. He himself says that these events were not planned by him but that something compelled him to do things. It was only at my insistence that he stayed back for a few more years so that I could pick up the trade secrets, but finally he left the ashram on 8.8.88.

When he was in Australia in 1984, after leaving his ashram and deciding to finish off with his yoga work, he had a very big accident. Of course, nobody knew about this except me and the swami director there. We took him underground for about one month. During that accident, he again had a vision of his ishta devata, saying, "You are delaying your departure." Then Sri Swamiji realized that he should not stay within the confines of the ashram any more. It was as if the accident had served as the hint, "Hey, you are delaying yourself!"

When he left the ashram he used to travel incognito. Even his guru-brother Swami Chidananda could not recognize him. He went again to the same temple of his ishta devata and said, "I have come, even though I am five years late. Now what?" In the course of his stay there, he was given another instruction, in the form of a vision in which he received the following command: "Go to my burial ground." Sri Swamiji's ishta devata is Lord Shiva, and in Indian tradition the burial ground of Lord Shiva is said to

be Deoghar. The name *Deoghar* means 'home of the gods'. So he answered, "Where do I go in Deoghar?" Again he had a vision, this time of a plot of land, which he later described to Swami Satsangi and sent her in search of.

When Swami Satsangi arrived in Deoghar, she went inside the huge Shiva temple there and prayed, "Let the wishes of my guru be fulfilled." When she was coming out of the temple, a man approached her and asked, "Why have you come here?" She said, "I have come to look for a piece of land." He replied, "I will take you and show you a piece of land." That land was the exact picture Sri Swamiji had described to her. The man said, "It was only this morning that I decided to sell the land and I want to sell it to a spiritual organization or person." The next day I went and signed the papers and paid forty percent of the total price.

Things just happened, one by one. Without any fighting or pushing, things just fell into their slots. As soon as the land was in our possession, we informed Sri Swamiji. So, before leaving the place where he was, he again went to the temple and surrendered his geru dhoti, watch, mala and everything. He said, "I used them as tools for the mission which you gave me, and now that mission is over I am handing them back to you, to give to whoever you wish."

Then he came to Deoghar where he is now. In Deoghar, Sri Swamiji's life has taken a different turn altogether. He remains in seclusion and Bihar School of Yoga (BSY) has constructed only the minimum necessities for him as a mark of respect, to honour him. He decided he would not accept help from the people he had come to know through yoga.

He does different kinds of sadhana at Deoghar. He has received the instructions to repeat his mantra with every breath, twenty-four hours of the day, and that is what he is gradually trying to do. He says, "I have to clear my blackboard (his mind) of its previous impressions." That is the reason why he does not wish to see anybody because they again bring up the same impressions. He says that the past is past; he has stopped being a guru and that those people

who do not like it can search for another guru and should not disturb him in any way.

His only companions are two Alsatian dogs, and they are so intuitive that as soon as he closes his eyes they come and place themselves before him. They will not allow anybody to go near him at that time. When he opens his eyes they go and do their own things. Even when swamis from here go to see Sri Swamiji the dogs attack them. They have been trained as attack dogs by the police. It is not only their training which is good, but also their intuitive ability to feel which mood Sri Swamiji is in.

His routine is very unconventional. In winter he gets up at midnight, takes a bath under the sky at 2 am and does seventy rounds of surya namaskara, 3,000 rounds of bhastrika pranayama and different forms of pranayamas which are not written down, but passed on orally from guru to disciple. He cooks his own food once a day. In the summer he does a form of austerity known as *panchagni tapasya*. In summer the Deoghar temperatures go up to forty-five degrees Celsius and he sits out in the open, under the sun, and lights fires around himself. Inside the enclosed area the temperature reaches between eighty-five to ninety degrees Celsius. There he practises his sadhana. He wears just a waist cloth, sleeps on the floor on a mattress made out of gunny bags, the kind which are kept near the door for wiping feet. During winter and summer he sleeps out; only in the rainy season does he sleep inside the room. It is a natural, outdoor life.

Sri Swamiji has said that those who have finished their karma and samskaras can join him in this sadhana. So, Swami Atmananda, his first sannyasin disciple, finished off her work in Singapore and joined him in Deoghar. She stays in another property which was also built by BSY. It seems that eventually, as and when people finish off their karmas and are ready to evolve in sadhana, they will go there and establish themselves. Of course, many of the swamis aspire to this end, but to finish off one's karmas is not an easy task, and very few are able to attain it.

When I was there at the beginning of this year, he came out from his sadhana and said, “Niranjan, I have received another instruction: ‘Provide your neighbours with the same facilities that you have.’ Since I don’t have any money and I don’t have any facilities, I’m giving that duty to you. Fulfil that command on my behalf.”

I became very happy that at last we had been given instructions to assist Sri Swamiji in his sadhana. What are his facilities? A 4 x 6 open-air kitchen, an open shed where he sleeps and performs his sadhana, open shower and toilet, and a hand-pump for water. So we made plans to provide his neighbours with a four-room house, open kitchen, toilet and water. I do not want it to be a structure of cement and concrete, but a mud brick structure.

I sent one swami to be trained in that kind of construction work. We will take up two houses. Then we will have to wait for the funds to come, because I cannot do that work from BSY, as it is not officially endorsed to do social work. Sivananda Math is first and foremost a social organization and will be taking up the job. We are starting this mission on the 10th of January 1993. On that day, Sri Swamiji will come out of seclusion and be available for a few days.

Sri Swamiji is seventy. The things he does would not be possible for an ordinary man. Considering all the sadhana he has been given, and the type of divine instruction he has received, it seems that only those who have approached the kingdom of heaven can receive such things. Regarding his dynamism: he has changed totally and has become very strong physically. His body is like bronze from exposure to the elements. There is an intense aura of vitality and energy radiating from him. Whenever I go there my mind goes blank. No thoughts come; no problems remain. That whole area is vibrating like a living organism! His eyes have become so bright, that you cannot look at his face! If they look at you, they seem to go right through you. Only he and God know in which direction he has to go now; we do not.

How can we transcend mental blocks such as anger, shyness, and fear? Sometimes they appear instantly and need quick yogic action.

In this instant coffee, milk and tea culture the only thing that has preserved its naturalness has been yoga. Therefore, please do not try to create an 'instant yoga' for these things. There are techniques which will provide you with instant relief, but they require particular preparation. You are talking about mental states. We have to have the ability to recognize these mental states and how they influence the behaviour, action, thought and personality.

Yoga does not consider these things to be mental blocks. They are natural manifestations of a dissipated mind. The manifestations of a dissipated mind are known in yoga as *vruttis*. According to the philosophy of yoga there are five main kinds of *vruttis* or modifications of the mind which influence and shape our lives: cognition, fantasy, memory, sleep and wrong notion or identity.

Our emotions, behaviour, feelings, and actions are all subject to these five modifications of the mind. If there is an emotional outburst, there is also a link with the aspect of memory and cognition. I am talking now in terms of the subject of yogic psychology. If there is fear, it is related to a memory, a cognitive faculty or a false notion that something may happen. Every kind of mental manifestation, physical reaction, and behaviour pattern can be attributed to different manifestations and combinations of *vruttis*.

We try to overcome our particular block, which is a symptom of these *vruttis*, without realizing its cause. That is the way of modern therapy: if somebody has a headache, they take aspirin without knowing what the cause is! If the cause is mental tension, or the external environment, then the headache will occur again. Yoga, however, does not promote symptomatic treatment. It does not advocate the notion that by fixing up the symptoms we can resolve the cause of imbalance within. Although there are techniques in yoga which can help overcome these symptoms for some

time, we should try to make an effort to realize the cause, because the mind is something which we have to live with right until the time of our death. We can change many things in life including cars, houses, spouses, but we cannot change our mind. So, we have to learn how to live with it by evolving our understanding of it.

In our external life, the mind follows the senses. The senses attract the mind to the object. Therefore, training has to be given so the senses follow the mind. The remedy for ninety-nine percent of our problems is that the senses follow the mind. The whole spectrum of pratyahara and dharana is based on this idea. The practices and systems of pratyahara and dharana aim to bring us to an understanding of the functioning of our mind. This is the first step which we have to take: we have to prepare ourselves before attempting any quick treatment for the mind.

When we are able to know the different weaknesses and strengths of the mind, to understand our reactions and feelings in relation to different situations created within the mind, it becomes easy to be aware of states such as anger and fear. Normally, if there is anger within us and we express it, are we aware at the time that we are expressing it? No; it is an instantaneous reaction which saturates the entire body, thinking and mental process.

Take a simple example. You are working in the dark and touch a piece of rope; you mistake it for a snake and become very frightened. This happens many times to people in the ashram. There are often pieces of rope lying around the place, and you know how the electricity is in Munger. So, when you go to the bathroom and come across a piece of rope, you mistake it for a snake and go back to your room without going to the bathroom at all. Why are you afraid at that time? Have you thought about it? If you had a torch and had shone it on the rope you would have realized that it was a rope, not a snake, and the fear would have gone away. However, the impression of the snake is in your memory, so anything which resembles a snake in your cognition triggers off that memory.

In the absence of right perception there is darkness, absence of light, and we feel the reaction of fear. When there is light or cognitive awareness, the fear has no place. The practices of pratyahara and dharana help provide this cognitive perception of every aspect of the mind and personality. When we are confronted with certain situations, there are techniques which can be practised instantaneously to overcome them.

For example, when I went to Greece in 1977 the customs did not let me enter. They took away my passport and I was sitting under the eyes of two huge burly guards. They were saying all kinds of funny things in Greek which I could not understand. There were also two or three other passengers sitting beside me. I think they had done something wrong, because every time the guards used to come by they trembled in their boots, but I looked up and gave them a nice smile.

The passengers asked me: "Aren't you afraid? Aren't you nervous?" I said, "No, I am not nervous, why should I be nervous?" I had my mala and was doing my japa. And they asked, "How can you keep calm under such a stressful situation?" I told them, "Practise yoga and you will know what I am doing right now." My belief was that by being nervous I would not gain anything. Therefore, instead of fuming and fretting I started with my japa.

Breathing techniques are also very effective for balancing the emotions of anger and fear, but of course self-observation is the main key to realizing our mental states.

Could you please tell us the best way to preserve that tranquil feeling of mental and physical balance and introversion when we get back home after leaving the ashram?

Do not aspire for it. Too much of a good thing is also bad for the health. Too much chilli will cause indigestion and too many sweet things will also cause indigestion. Despite this advice, if you still wish to maintain the ashram atmosphere in your home, then convert your home into an ashram. If you cannot do that, then try to become a walking and living

ashram yourself, where you are at peace with yourself and there is no war and conflict within you, where you are able to face all situations with a balanced frame of mind and where you can maintain your spiritual identity while being surrounded by material attractions. The secret is to maintain the identity of spiritual life in normal life.

The experience of spiritual life cannot be had in an ashram; it cannot be had in the house, or on the mountain top or in the cities, if your head is not screwed on properly. If your head is screwed on properly then you can experience it wherever you are. There is a saying of Sri Swamiji, “There is no peace in the Himalayas and no noise in the marketplace.” It is all within you, and in your ability to observe every situation in the right perspective. The noisy places will become peaceful and tranquil when you are able to observe the positive qualities of that environment; the silence of the Himalayas can be shattered by the chattering of your own mind.

Therefore, find a way to maintain your spiritual identity and you will have an environment better than any ashram around!

How to maintain one’s spiritual identity in the world?

It is easy. Just devote six minutes of your twenty-four hours disassociating yourself from the body and mind. Twenty-three hours to do as you please. Enjoy life to the maximum during that time, but for those six minutes disassociate yourself from the experiences of the body and mind. Go into a meditative state and say to yourself, “I am not the experiences of the body; I am neither ambition nor desire, nor craving. I am at peace with myself and I am unaffected by the mud and stones which the world can throw at me.” You will then see that you will become a living, walking ashram.

Please tell us some ways through which we can achieve bhakti.

Bhakti is one of the highest sadhanas for those who are sincerely interested to evolve spiritually. Bhakti creates a

link between us and the individual or entity that we hold in reverence. This ultimately leads to the fusion of two spirits. At that time one forgets the concept of time and space.

When the mind is intensely involved in something, the concept of time is lost. For example, when two lovers talk to each other, their hours of talking will seem like ten minutes, because at that time there is intense involvement from every aspect of the personality. When you encounter a person with whom you cannot see eye to eye, one minute will seem like a year, because there is no intensity in that encounter or relationship. Bhakti is intensity of communication, relationship, emotion, and is considered to be the highest spiritual practice.

There have been many saints in Christian and other traditions who perfected bhakti. They were constantly in communion with the divine. Why does that not happen to us? It is because we do not have the natural intensity of bhakti. We only have the intensity of intellect. Swami Sivananda used to describe the feeling of bhakti by saying that if you submerge a person in water, and hold them under, they will start gasping for air. All their mind and energies will be focused on just one thing, taking a deep breath in. At that moment, when they intensely desire a lungful of air, nothing will be perceived by the senses or intellect, body or mind. That same intense urge is awakened in bhakti through different practices.

I used to be a non-believer and I never understood why people used to like bhakti so much. I asked Sri Swamiji, "What is there in bhakti? It is nothing; it is not necessary." He told me, "A time will come when you will understand by yourself." Nowadays I do not think that I could accept a life without bhakti, because this feeling of bhakti is a very deep internal feeling of having found the missing link of life, the support or basis of existence.

Prior to the awakening of bhakti, life is very mechanical: taking birth, leading a routine life, begetting children, struggling with a job, retiring, leading a retired life, and

finally going on a very long journey. It is like becoming a member of a club and then leaving it; we are all life members of this club called Earth. What happens when we withdraw our membership? Bhakti provides the missing aspect, when our life stops being mechanical and develops a sense of inner identity and union.

Bhakti can have many forms. Generally, we express our faith and devotion by a request. That is known as *apara bhakti*, or material faith and devotion. We pray, “O Lord, you are all-merciful, please grant us the following.” Then we rattle off a big list: wealth, happiness, contentment, and after that, “Thank you Lord for everything that Thou givest.” Now, you know, I know and everyone knows that the Lord to whom we pray is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. We know that He knows everything, but still we consider Him stupid enough to tell Him what we want, and hope He will fulfil it.

I know a prayer: “O Lord, forgive me for my three great sins. First in praying to you, I forgot you are omniscient. That was the first sin which I committed. Second, in searching for you in temples and mosques and other places of worship, I forgot you are omnipresent. And third, in thinking about you; even that is a sin, because you are beyond thought.” If there has to be a prayer it should be like this.

This form of bhakti is known as *para bhakti*, bhakti which joins the individual mind with the cosmic mind, where ‘I’ is not different from that universal consciousness and there is a harmonious flow of energy between sahasrara and mooladhara. This stage is known as *advaita*, which is without duality. This philosophy has been presented by every person who has attained that state. Christ has also said, “I and my Father are one.” Saints have said, “There is no difference between you and He. You are the Light.” This is known as the highest form of bhakti.

Please talk to us about real love and humility.

I cannot, because I have never experienced it. I do not think any unrealized person can experience real love and humility,

because the love which we experience through our mind is conditioned. The love that we express is conditioned. Every good quality we try to express or adopt in life is conditioned. There is always a reason or motive behind all of our expressions and behaviour. Either we wish to impress people, to gain something, or to become holy saints overnight. There is always a reason behind it.

Real love, humility, compassion and other qualities are experienced only when the gross tendencies of mind have been transcended. I wonder if the love between two lovers can be called pure. I wonder if the statement, “My love for you is eternal”, can be called pure, because at that moment you are projecting an idea which is motivated either by the desire for some kind of gain or satisfaction, by the desire for happiness, contentment or some kind of emotional support and security. We mistakenly feel that real love can be reflected in the normal mind.

The Sufis say there are two kinds of love. One is mental love which they call *ishk mijazi*, *ishk* means love and *mijazi* means ‘according to one’s liking’. The other is *ishk hakiki*. *Hakiki* means transcendental or divine; that which is born out of the depths of the spirit. In normal life such a state can be experienced if there is intensity within the mind. When two minds fuse, then a similar state can be experienced.

Love is a state of fusion. A harmonious flow of energy from my side and a harmonious flow from your side create love. Realized souls tell us that in the state of pure love there is no duality because it transcends every kind of barrier of mind and emotion, and becomes one in spirit.

You may have heard of empathy, where, if somebody is feeling some kind of pain, you can feel the same pain. Empathy is the transfer of an experience from an external source to oneself. It can also happen the other way around; you can project something. This is possible when there is fusion of minds. Now just imagine the state of empathy intensified a trillion times; when the whole being, the whole awareness concentrates on just one experience. When one

remains and everything else is forgotten: that is union. Pure love can be experienced at this time. Mirabai is a perfect example of this.

There have been many incidents of poet saints in India who were able to converse with God directly, face to face. They could see Him, touch Him and experience Him, while others could not see anything. We call them the bhakta saints. The intensity of their love was awakened to such a degree that the whole concept of divinity became visible to them. Modern psychiatry would define them as psychotics, because it cannot conceive of anything beyond mind. However, this is a spiritual experience.

In the state of pure love, who is big and who is small? When there is equality then nothing remains: no arrogance, no ego, and that is the state of humility.

Please talk to us about the differences between traditional and modern yoga. For example, what is the relation between *ahimsa*, non violence, and karate, or dharma and common sense? What are the moral principles in modern yoga?

To my understanding there is no such thing as traditional yoga and modern yoga, because the practices have not changed in any way. However, modern-day understanding of the yogic principles is more objective and scientific, as we are now more aware of how the yoga techniques work on the body and mind. In the traditional understanding of yoga, faith was the most important thing. That faith has now been replaced by scientific and systematic understanding.

In regard to the health aspect of yoga, let us take an example. Somebody has diabetes, they are asked to perform certain asanas and they get better. Now, with the advance of modern science, we are able to perceive the changes taking place in the functioning of the internal organs, and thus we know exactly what is happening within that person's body. The same principle applies to the mind and psyche. Therefore, our understanding has changed and this has given us a different outlook on yoga. Maybe when this

civilization passes, the next civilization will again practise yoga from the aspect of faith. The practices themselves never change, only from time to time they are given a different name, and a different understanding is brought about.

The second part of the question relates to ahimsa and karate. Normally ahimsa is interpreted as non-violence, but actually it means 'abandoning the hostile personality'. The concept of non-violence and the abandonment of a hostile personality are different. With the growth of consciousness and mind, we become more balanced and pure internally. There evolves an understanding of our own nature, and we are able to observe our hostility and gradually transcend it, because the hostile nature that is within us is detrimental to us and to others. It is a state which continually destroys our personality and our relationships.

Violence has been taken to mean something physical, when it is not. If I hit somebody, that will be known as an act of violence, but if I send negative vibrations of anger, hatred and jealousy, that will not be considered as violence, but it is violence.

Yoga says violence is not only physical, but is a part of our personality. Only those who have attained a high state of consciousness can become non-violent, and that means in every respect: physical, mental and spiritual. Yoga cannot conceive of the physical abandonment of violence without first attaining mental tranquillity, harmony and balance. The moment you abandon hostility you become a follower of ahimsa.

Karate is generally considered to be an art of self-defence. However, in yoga it is viewed as something different. Do you know who discovered karate? Not a Japanese person, not a Chinese person, but Buddha himself. Buddha was the epitome of non-violence, compassion and love, but in order that his disciples could defend themselves in hostile conditions without killing somebody, he developed the art of karate. To save a life without taking one is not considered to be himsa or ahimsa. It is being conscious about life, and you cannot classify this as either violence or non-violence.

Karate is not just a physical art, it is also a pranic art, and a meditative science as well. The name 'karate' was given by the Chinese. It was further developed in China with the arrival of Buddhism in that country. With the decline of Buddhism, even the art of karate was lost. The principles of karate are very simple and similar to yoga: (1) coordination of body, mind and prana, (2) direction of prana to a specific part of the body to gain strength and stamina. Even a ninety-year-old lady who knows this art can easily floor a strong, young person, because it does not depend on physical strength but on coordination of body, mind and prana.

In the olden days, such arts were preserved by the priests and not by warriors or common people. Even tai-chi is a martial art. It is a very smooth and slow-moving exercise, but if you do it very fast it becomes lethal. When you do it slowly it gives an understanding and awareness of the energies within, and surrounding, the body.

There has to be a basic understanding of the techniques and practices that we are learning, and an awareness of when and how to use them. Karate actually helps in the abandonment of hostility. You know, when I used to walk the streets of America in my geru robes, people used to call me 'Kung Fu'. I used to swing my rudraksha in my hands, and nobody came within ten miles of me. So appearance and training also help.

About dharma and common sense. They are both the same thing. *Dharma* means eternal obligation, duty and nature of every being. The law that governs life, and which we follow is known as dharma. This dharma takes many different forms. One is the individual dharma, the individual obligation to friends, family, society, culture, country, and the world in general. The fulfilment of this duty and obligation is following the precepts of individual dharma. This we do both consciously and unconsciously. Then there is a relationship dharma, between children and parents, husband and wife, student and teacher. This involves the aspect of faith and trust in our interactions with each other.

The third form of dharma is what we imbibe from our society and culture, what we have been taught from our childhood: how to live, how to behave, and what our aim in life should be. Another aspect of dharma is spiritual dharma, and all these aspects depend upon our common sense. It is the common sense or awareness which gives us a clear idea of how to act, when to act, and also why to act, according to different situations, environments and conditions.

The main moral principle of yoga is: live peacefully and let others live peacefully. If you live peacefully, and let others live peacefully, that, by itself is a very great achievement. This will give birth to many qualities within you. In yogic literature they describe the five yamas, and the five niyamas, which help to discipline one's life and create a harmonious system of thinking, behaving, interaction and action.

Take, for example, the concept of speaking the truth all the time. Truth is something very difficult to comprehend and speak, because when we speak the truth it is criticism of others. Somebody once asked me, "Swamiji, do you ever speak the truth?" I said, "No, the truth is something I have never spoken in my life, and which I do not think I will ever speak, because this in itself requires a very different frame of mind."

There is a saying in yoga, "Speak the pleasant truth and not the unpleasant truth, and if you have to say the unpleasant, find a pleasant way of saying it." By doing this you fulfil the second condition of ahimsa: do not create a hostile environment within yourself or a hostile reaction from others.

Not being possessive is the third aspect. Possessiveness here does not mean accumulation of wealth and material objects, but recognition of the cravings, desires and ambitions, knowing what is within our reach and what is not, and not becoming unnecessarily tense or full of anxiety for not having it.

Hence, different guidelines have been given in yoga but they all depend upon the mental tranquillity of the individual. Therefore, the main moral principle of modern yoga is: "Live peacefully and let others live peacefully."

Trying to live peacefully with yourself will give you an understanding of your own nature and personality. You will learn how to adjust with yourself, how to be in harmony with yourself. By letting others live peacefully, you will also become aware of their state, recognize their needs and help them reach their objective, while fulfilling your role within your own dharma.

When the disciple has better awareness will he get further guidance from the guru?

Yes, definitely. In order to have a smooth flow of electricity from the socket and a good connection, it is necessary to have good wires and a carbon-free line. Thus, with the awakening of consciousness, when you feel the need of guru's guidance, you are bound to get it.

If awareness is not there and you need guru's guidance, then realizing it, receiving it, accepting it and understanding it will be very difficult. The purer your consciousness becomes, the closer you are to the guru. The more your awareness evolves, the closer you are to the guru.

How responsible are parents for their children's direction in life?

Yoga states that parents play a very vital role in the lives of children. In their early stages of development, children are very susceptible to the influences imbibed from their parents. It is the behaviour and attitude of the parents which can shape and alter their lives. There is an obligation towards children from the parent's side which should be understood: to provide them with good *samskaras*, mental impressions, which can help them progress in the life which they choose. Children should be given the knowledge of how to maintain mental clarity. They should imbibe the knowledge of what is both just and unjust.

Parents should not project their idiosyncrasies on to their children in any way, but allow them to grow independently. Parents feel that they have failed in bringing their children

up when the parents are unable to provide their children with good samskaras and yet have high expectations of them, and the children then do not reach up to their expectations. Children are independent beings who need their own space in which to develop, and they require encouragement, support and guidance. They need positive understanding from their parents.

In every respect it is the samskaras which play a very vital role in your children's lives, and if you can help them awaken the samskaras within them, then you fulfil your obligation as parents.

Please define awareness further.

Awareness is the process of becoming conscious. It is a process of the cognitive perception of events, conditions, objects, situations and the environment. When you become more observant of these situations, then awareness evolves. The ability to observe every kind of situation is increase of awareness.

A long time ago, when I was a boy, Sri Swamiji told me, "Try to be aware of everything that happens to you in life." So, gradually I started by first becoming aware of my physical movements; observing my own physical reactions in different environments and situations. Initially, I used to be consciously aware for periods of five to ten minutes. Later, I also tried to be aware of things happening in my mind.

Even in this initial state I could feel a very great cognitive perception inside. Now, even when I am talking, speaking, writing or reading I am aware of every kind of physical movement and thought. From personal experience, I can say that being consciously perceptive to body and mind evolves the consciousness to the point where it becomes spiritual awareness.

If you look at your body right now and become aware of its posture, you will see that there are many areas which you have never been aware of: the contact of the cloth with the skin, the slight tension in different muscles in the

body, the pressure in different limbs, the parts of the body which are touching each other and their contact sensation. These are the things which give birth to a different kind of homogeneous and harmonious perception.

So, begin to develop awareness of the physical side, something which you can perceive externally: when you breathe, the rise and fall of the chest; when you blink, the eyes, the closing and opening of the eyelids; when you speak, the movement of the tongue and lips. Observe your body as you would, for example, at the time of tai-chi: slow and coordinated movements, like a dance.

Once you reach a certain stage with the body, begin to work with the mind. Start with the conscious sensory perceptions: things that you see, things that you hear, things that you observe. Then go deeper into your thoughts, feelings, emotions, and see their relationship with the body.

One example is anger. Anger is a mental state, but it changes the whole physical attention. The physical condition changes with an emotion. At that time when we get angry, what is our physical condition? Tense muscles, stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system, loss of mental clarity, and the surfacing of intense emotion.

Once you are able to observe the physical and mental state at the time of an outburst, you will develop attention and awareness of that condition, and gradually be able to apply this to every action and situation in life. So awareness is nothing but increase of cognitive perception.

Why do yoga practitioners distance themselves from family, friends and society, creating interpersonal conflict?

No, this whole concept is wrong. At least, we have never seen that there has been a distance with anybody. Rather, we have come closer all the time to people, whether it was Swami Sivananda or Sri Swamiji or anybody, but I can understand your question from the point of view of isolation.

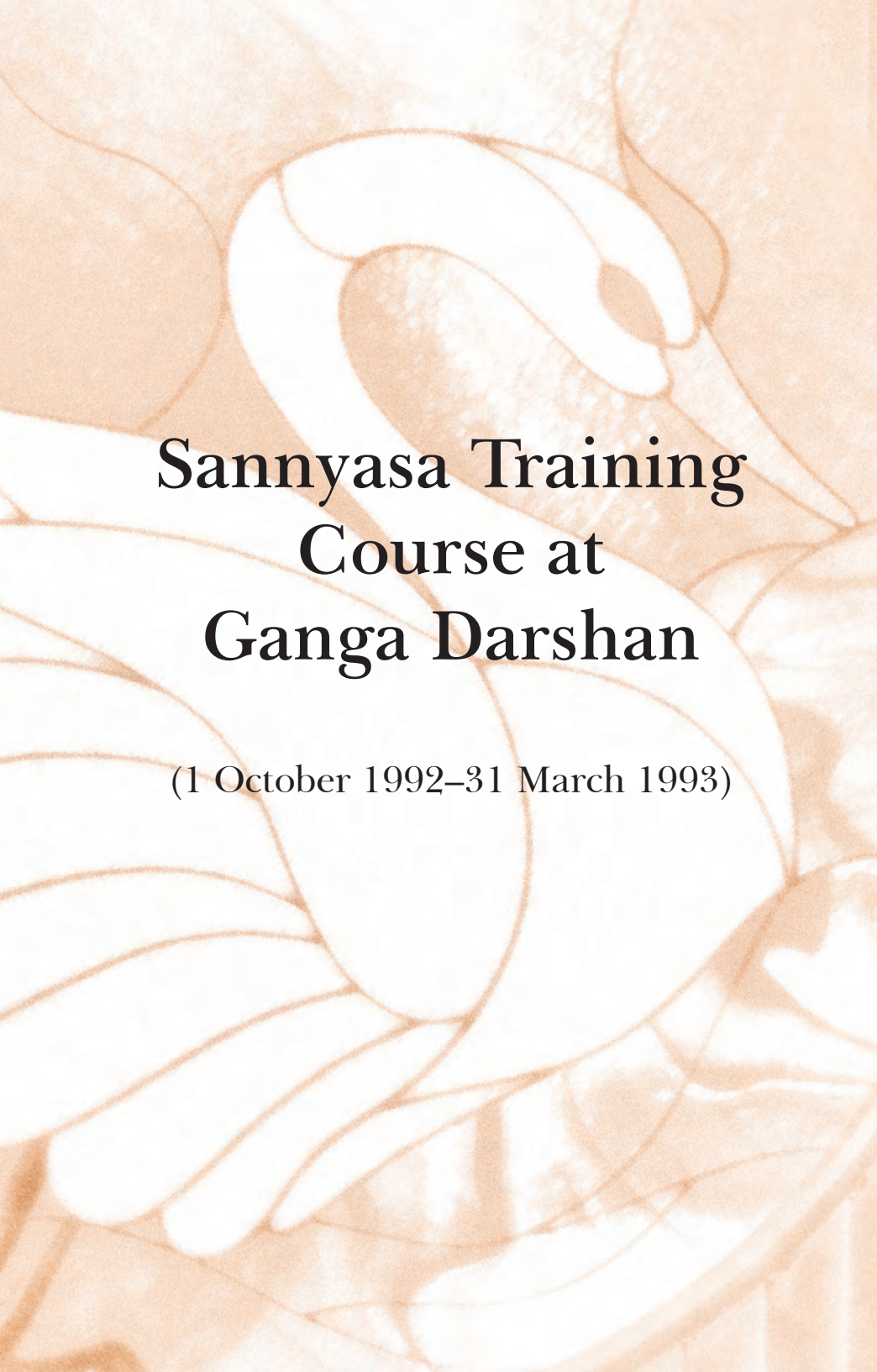
There comes a time when people evolve to the point of not finding anything worthwhile in life or in other people.

They find the same situations; the same talk, the same environment and problems, and they react to that kind of monotony. An increase in sensitivity makes them even more aware of their need to attain something deeper.

We find that when they come to yoga their lifestyle changes. The parties and the disco dances which they used to enjoy two years ago are now suddenly very disturbing. In order to maintain their inner peace and sanctity they tend to withdraw from these things and create a condition of isolation within themselves. Perhaps due to the lack of proper guidance, there is an inability to bring about a mental balance and they become like recluses.

Many times it happens between husband and wife too. The wife begins to practise yoga and does not like to go to parties. Then the husband wonders, "What has happened to my wife?" Such things do happen and, in my opinion, it is due to a lack of proper guidance. Sri Swamiji has always said that it is better that two people have the same goal and direction in life so they can support each other and not create a hindrance. However, if the mind is balanced and the state of isolation is avoided, the personality becomes very open, creative, and free.





Sannyasa Training Course at Ganga Darshan

(1 October 1992–31 March 1993)



*I went to beg alms from house to house.
During my wandering down the dusty road,
I saw your golden chariot and felt confident
that by receiving alms from you
my miseries would disappear.
Your shining chariot stopped near me,
as, full of hope, I approached you.
You saw me,
and came down from the chariot to greet me.
I thought that my destiny had surely changed,
but you stretched out your hands
and begged alms from me!
That was a bad joke,
you begging for alms.
With disappointment in my heart,
I gave you a few grains of rice from my bowl
which you took, and rode off into the blue beyond.
During sunset, when I emptied my bowl,
in it I found a few grains of gold.
At that time I cried –
“Oh, that I could have given you my all!”*

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Introduction

Sannyasa training

Do not have any kind of expectation of what you will do or what you will learn during the sannyasa training. The best way to receive or attain something is to have a surprise at every step of the way without having any expectations. Expectation is a form of conditioning and here we are trying to remove the preconditioning of the mind in order to understand and absorb something different. What is this difference? It is spirituality, yoga and sannyasa.

Spirituality has to be understood, not from the conventional viewpoint, but from a different angle. Only when we begin to understand spirituality will we be able to understand yoga and sannyasa. Spirituality is the idea of transcendence which has been emphasized in the yogic tradition since the dawn of history.

Who am I?

Originally, when human beings first appeared upon this planet, they started to question, “Who am I? What am I? What is this body? What is this mind? What controls the mind? What is the force which motivates body and mind?” This kind of self-enquiry became the foundation stone of spiritual awakening. The search for the answers to these eternal questions represents true spirituality.

In the course of time, when people understood that they were living in a confined environment of body, mind,

emotions, interactions and behaviour, they tried to figure out ways to transcend their limitations and improve their performance. The methods which they developed became techniques for transcendence which were given different names. One name was yoga, which is a collection of various techniques and practical instructions devised to help man realize the behaviour, action and interaction of body, mind, emotion and other aspects of the personality.

Gradually people pursued this kind of life, searching for the answers, for the missing link which connects us with our higher, divine or transcendental nature. They came to the conclusion that a way of life had to be adopted which was conducive to achieving this subtle awareness of the Self. They called this kind of life *sannyasa*: a balanced, integrated and harmonious lifestyle.

The idea of *sannyasa* evolved in various cultures in different ways. Some developed the concept of a reclusive lifestyle, dedicated purely to *sadhana* and *jnana*, self-enquiry. Some also included *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga* and *raja yoga*. Others integrated various spiritual concepts into *sannyasa*, and thus different cultures evolved their own patterns of *sannyasa*.

Viveka and vairagya

Today, *sannyasa* is understood in the form of *viveka* and *vairagya*. *Viveka* means right understanding; it is having a proper, practical and comprehensive understanding of life and our place in it. *Vairagya* means non-attachment to the world of objects and senses. *Viveka* and *vairagya* became the two limbs or wings of *sannyasa*. *Sannyasa* is incomplete in the absence of either of these two principles. One can be non-attached but lack right understanding. Similarly, one can have right understanding but find it very hard to develop and maintain non-attachment.

The idea in *sannyasa* is to awaken these two faculties simultaneously, and to grow with them in order to find ultimate liberation or *mukti*. This liberation or freedom

from samskaras and karmas is achieved through intensive discipline of body, mind and life in general. It is definitely not found by trying to express our freedom openly in the marketplace.

Yoga holds a very firm view that in order to attain spiritual freedom, one has to undergo a process of self-purification, self-observation and self-analysis, and overcome the minor attractions that bind our faculties to the world of the senses, sensual pleasures and objects.

Sannyasa became a combination of the principles of viveka and vairagya, and yoga became a method of developing self-awareness by utilizing different techniques which enable us to go deep within ourselves, and harmonize and channel the expressions of mind and emotions. Sannyasa and yoga combined create a very powerful spiritual awakening which is known as *vidya*, knowledge. This knowledge leads to self-effulgence or self-awareness.

Unbound knowledge

There are two kinds of knowledge. One hypnotizes while the other is a liberating force. The purpose of knowledge is not to bind one to a particular idea, doctrine or philosophy, but to expand one's perception and enable one to constantly explore new dimensions of one's being. Therefore, one of the rules that we are going to follow is not to have any preconceived ideas, because they represent the knowledge which is binding. Do not accept any of my ideas either, because they will also bind you. Listen to them and experiment with them, but find your own source of experience which will give you a better understanding of yourself, yoga, spirituality and sannyasa. Be open and analyze, observe and experience, because it is only through openness that you will be able to go far in spiritual life.

One of the aspects of spirituality is all encompassing balanced wisdom, not knowledge which binds. The Upanishads express these sentiments when they say that knowledge leads to light and also to darkness. Knowledge

which is confined to a particular idea leads to darkness, whereas an open attitude towards knowledge leads to light. One principle which has to be followed by a spiritual aspirant is to have an open mind. These are the traditional concepts of spirituality.

Search for happiness

As society grew, we became more and more aware of our external requirements and needs. We became more aware of our ambitions and desires, of our strengths and weaknesses, and of our physical, mental, intellectual, emotional and social needs. We then started to fulfil these needs and ambitions, a process which eventually separated us from our inner being. We became extroverted by nature and lost touch with our inner nature. An imbalance was created in our lives, and the external motivation and drive limited our faculties.

Our awareness became caught up in an external identity, in the search for happiness, pleasure and satisfaction in external life. We actually stultified our mental faculties and wasted our time in looking for sensory and sensual enjoyment outside. No doubt, we achieved a lot technologically, but the imbalance which is created by the external drive is very visible today.

We all have funny ideas, concepts and beliefs. These are very superficial. We wish to go deep and experience something new, attain something different, but we do not really know how. In our search for happiness we try different methods for some time. We seek inner happiness through yoga and say, “Yes, this technique feels right for me; it suits me.” If we try something else, again it will be to gain a sense of satisfaction, to fill the gap within.

The search that we are conducting for spiritual transcendence is actually a fallacy, because even there we are looking for self-satisfaction. When we meditate we expect to have good experiences, and if we have a good experience we say, “Wow, that meditation was really powerful!” On the other hand, if we have a bad experience we say, “It didn’t feel right; it is not for me.”

With such limited ideas we are trying to progress spiritually. We are, however, limiting ourselves and our growth by searching for satisfaction in whatever we do. This has been one of the biggest reasons why people have not been able to achieve any heights in spiritual experience. Despite their sincere efforts they have been unable to realize the weaknesses of their personality. They have not really tried to get in touch with their spirit.

Spirituality

Spirit has been defined as a combination of Purusha and Prakriti, Shiva and Shakti, or consciousness and energy. This consciousness is not the one that is experienced through the mind, nor the one we think of as being beyond mind. The consciousness which is a part of spirit is the underlying nature of everything, whether animate or inanimate. The same applies to the energy principle. It also underlies every stratum of creation, both manifest and unmanifest. Purusha and Prakriti combined are known as spirit or 'I'. Spirituality therefore has to be understood in terms of realizing the nature of Purusha and Prakriti, in order to understand the true principles and ideas behind spirituality.

The distractions of life and the pursuit of happiness and pleasure give birth to incomplete experiences which later on become incomplete philosophies. When we are looking outside for enjoyment and satisfaction, we create a particular idea or concept with our mind extroverted and half aware. We create a half-idea, because it does not include both the internal and external mind. That half-idea then becomes our philosophy, our culture and it emphasizes only one aspect of human attainment and behaviour. Such ideas are only half spiritual because they have not considered the deeper aspects of human nature with which we have lost contact.

Such half-ideas lack concrete evidence and experience and this gives birth to an abstract philosophy, a pie-in-the-sky philosophy. Spirituality does not believe in abstract philosophies. It believes in definite, precise and concrete

ideas dealing with self-development and the awakening of human potential. Spirituality does not agree with abstract ideas which are just imagined or fantasized by somebody who may not even have found a balance between their own external and internal lives.

This type of self-styled philosophy creates one of the biggest problems, as later on this abstraction is somehow tailored to fill the gaps of the individual, and this leads one nowhere. The mind only becomes cluttered up with irrelevant concepts and ideas and the basic values and concepts of life are not cared for but neglected. Once they are neglected the whole direction of life changes. The whole approach of spirituality and yoga, which is a method of unification of the individual self with the higher self, changes. This is the point at which we are today in society. Therefore, our whole approach to spirituality must undergo a definite transformation.

Unlearn and integrate

In order to understand the principles which can induce this kind of change, I am asking and re-asking you to forget everything from today. That is a must if you wish to derive some benefit from sannyasa training. Nobody can make this effort for you. If you do not unlearn what you know, then it will just be a good course for you. Yes, it was a nice course, but in the end what did you get out of it? Nothing!

You have to decide whether you want to gain something from it or just think, “Yes, I had a good time in Munger Ashram.” If you only want a good time then there is no need to unlearn. However, if you want to gain something from being here, then unlearn everything that you have learned up to today, and from tomorrow your notebooks must be totally clean. That is one of the preconditions of the sannyasa course.

The effort of this sannyasa course will be to understand spirituality by combining the sannyasa lifestyle with the yogic techniques in order to get an integrated experience.

This can only happen in an ashram culture, it cannot happen outside.

Ashram culture

The ashram culture is one where you can integrate the sannyasa way of life with the methods of yoga and with new ideas of spirituality. One has to work for this because the word *ashram* means a place where one works.

The word ashram is derived from the Sanskrit root *shram* which means to make an effort. An ashram is a place where you make all kinds of effort. It is not a yoga school. Therefore, whenever we have a sannyasa course we close all the yoga activities, because the environment of a yoga school and that of an ashram are two different things.

Maybe you came here before and you visited a yoga school to learn something over a definite period of time: one week, one month, two months, and so on. You learnt hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, swara yoga, tattwa shuddhi, etc. and then you went back home. At that time you had come to a school and not an ashram, but from tomorrow the Bihar School of Yoga will become an ashram for six months.

Aside from the physical level, work and effort has to be made mainly on the mental level, because it is through the mind that we can attain liberation, and it is through the mind that we suffer bondage. One has to work with the mind, and yoga begins with the mind. If you have studied the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali you will know that he has indicated very clearly that yoga is controlling the modifications of the mind. This is stated in the second sutra.

The first sutra says that yoga is a form of discipline. What is the result of that discipline? One is thereby able to control the modifications and patterns of the mind. The result of this attainment is realization of the seer or spirit within. Therefore, working with the mind is taught as a part of ashram culture.

An ashram is a place where training is given to the mind. We have not trained our minds at all. We have been

educated, no doubt, some as electricians, some as carpenters, some as swamis, computer programmers or scientists, but we have not been educated as far as the mental disciplines are concerned.

Working with mental discipline is the aim of ashram culture, and in order to work with the mind one has to be aware of certain things. For example, silence.

Silence does not mean mouna. Stop the chattering of the mind. Try to achieve that silence, that harmony, that integrity of mind. Ashram culture is geared to a complete experience of mind. Not a moment should be lost. When you find that your mind is running wild, then do not lose a single moment; bring it back in line. That is the real trick.

No security

You are about to have six months of mental education. When you are educated in the ashram way, your distracted and dissipated energies will become balanced. Your desire for sensory and sensual pleasure will be minimized. The mind will become focused and one-pointed. That moment will mark your first step into spiritual life.

Many people come to an ashram environment seeking security, not understanding the real purpose and thrust of ashram culture. Sri Swamiji used to say that those people who seek security in an ashram environment are first class idiots, because one can never have security until one is able to control the mind.

There is a very beautiful saying of Sri Swamiji's which inspires me every moment of every day. That is, "There is no noise in the world and no quiet and peace in the mountains. All is within you." If you go into the deepest forest for silence and a quiet environment but your mind is not still, you will not find peace there. Similarly, if you live in the middle of Munger market with your mind under control, it will be like living on top of Mount Everest, because that sense of balance, equilibrium and harmony has been found within. This is the direction of ashram culture.

Questions & Answers

What does sannyasa mean to you personally?

I feel that sannyasa is a way of living which integrates the faculties of body, mind and spirit. In normal life there is a very big gap between the physical, mental and spiritual experience. I took sannyasa of my own free choice, and I was given the option of leaving it and the ashram at any time. However, in the course of my travels, when I saw that people were not satisfied despite their achievements, and were still having problems and difficulties in their relationships, in their interactions, and that they were suffering physically and emotionally, I thought, “I do not want to suffer like them.” That was the best way I could offer help to others. Sannyasa gave me an opening to help others and it is the right decision for my life.

Can you please tell us something about the sadhana of Sri Swamiji and of paramahansa sannyasins in general?

Sannyasa does not end with initiation or the putting on of the geru robe. It is an ongoing process of achieving harmony, perfection and cosmic unity. In brief, the sannyasa tradition speaks of four stages.

The first stage is an aspirant or novice. The second stage is a person living in an ashram, undergoing special training in terms of work in the ashram, or of teaching or working in society. This is done for the growth of the mission and the

propagation of an ideal that the swamis hold dear. In other words, they would not have taken sannyasa if they had not had an ideal concept that they held dear in their hearts.

The third stage of sannyasa is that of a renunciate. This renunciatory sannyasa, which is also known as kshestra sannyasa, comes later on when the desires or attachments with life have been overcome. That is the lifestyle of a paramahamsa.

In history we have seen the example of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa who led a very detached life. Though he was a householder, with a wife and disciples, all the time he was God intoxicated or Mother intoxicated. He never had any kind of mundane or worldly thoughts. Another good example is Ramana Maharshi, who led a very natural, peaceful and harmonious life. We also know of Baba Nityananda. He was unconcerned about the environment, the conditions he lived in, what he ate, what he wore and so forth. These people have attained another stage of paramahamsa, which is known as *avadhuta*, meaning those who have gone beyond body consciousness.

In the course of his life, a paramahamsa who is sincere in his quest has to go through a different and intense form of sadhana which can take any form according to the instructions of his guru. The sadhana of a paramahamsa is never written down. It is a tradition that is passed on from mind to mind, unlike, for example, yogic sadhanas which are described from A–Z, from yama and niyama to samadhi. These are defined sadhanas for normal people like us.

As the evolution of mind, consciousness and perception takes place, however, and one overcomes and exhausts the samskaras and karmas and opens oneself up to experience higher qualities and realities of nature, then sadhana and lifestyle have to undergo a change. Many brilliant sannyasins, like Swami Vivekananda or Swami Sivananda, and many sannyasins who are living in the world today, despite all their attainments, brilliance, knowledge and wisdom, and even despite their level of perfection, could not

complete the transition from the state of sannyasin to that of paramahansa, because of their karmas.

The story of Swami Vivekananda is an incredible life story. He experienced the vision of God with one touch from Ramakrishna. Despite having that vision, he had to come back and live like an ordinary person, and struggle for money, for the mission and for his fellow disciples. Despite having that vision, his karmas pulled him back down to the earthly plane. You may have a vision of God at any time, but if you have attachments to the world that are strong and powerful, that experience will be only a temporary one. In order to make it permanent, there has to be total purification of mind and spirit.

In Sri Swamiji's life the transition happened as a natural process, but still it was totally unexpected. Even in the early days of the ashram in 1963–1965 he used to say, "The ashram is not my life." When Sri Swamiji felt the time had come, and he received the inner call, and the instructions from his Ishta Devata, he left. The way he left was very strange. He established this ashram on the 19th of January 1963 and we do not know whether it was coincidence or whether it was planned, but exactly twenty years later on 19th January 1983, he resigned. He wanted to leave immediately but since we were all inexperienced in the ashram's affairs, he stayed a few more years.

We celebrated Sri Swamiji's last Guru Poornima on 26th–27th July 1988. One evening after Guru Poornima, when everybody had gone, we were sitting in the big room on the 6th floor and Sri Swamiji said that he was leaving in a few days' time. None of us wanted to believe his words. We thought it was just Sri Swamiji testing and teasing us, but the next morning he left. When he went he took just two dhotis and 108 rupees. At first, he wanted to be alone, but after some time he allowed some swamis to go and visit him, those who were in administration, so that we did not get any kind of heartache.

I think, going there to see him gave us more heartache than not seeing him at all. The life that Sri Swamiji used to

lead before was comparable to high society living; always travelling first class, always staying in five star hotels. Even his apartment in the ashram was air-conditioned. He was born in the mountains and was used to a cold climate. He could never stand the heat in Munger. All his previous rooms had air-conditioning fitted into them, including the Kutir. It was a very comfortable and enjoyable life. There must be many swamis who would give up their swamihood to lead such a life.

When Sri Swamiji started his travels, he was sleeping in rooms which had a one inch thick layer of dust, so thick with cobwebs you actually had to swim through them. It was shocking, but he said, "This is my life now. If I have to sleep in the gutter then I will sleep in the gutter. If I get anything to eat I will eat it, if I do not, I will not."

Sri Swamiji then went back to Tryambakeshwar to perform chaturmas sadhana, consisting of japa and mouna. It is a four month sadhana which, in traditional sannyasa is performed each year in the rainy season, the monsoon months. During that time the rivers are in flood, the roads are impassable and all transport stops. That tradition has carried on even today despite all the technological advances. The monsoon months are used by sannyasins for sadhana. Sri Swamiji decided to spend these months in the place of his Ishta Devata. There he renounced his geru cloth and his watch. Placing them near the idol of the Shivalingam he said, "These are my clothes, my mala and my wealth. You gave them to me for a purpose and I have fulfilled that purpose. Now I am returning everything to you."

After this he started practising his own chaturmas sadhana with the question in mind as to what he should do next. One day towards the end of his sadhana he had an experience in which he was neither awake nor asleep. In that state he felt as if a thunder storm was raging but he was not sure whether it was outside or inside; wind, rain, thunder, lightning, a really vivid experience. At that time he heard a command, an instruction, that the next phase of his life was to perfect unbroken awareness of his mantra. He asked

where he should do this. The message he received was, “In my graveyard.” So, finally Sri Swamiji went to Deoghar.

He does not wear dhotis any more, he does not have a shaved head any more because he has undertaken a sankalpa sadhana. He has gone beyond the stage of a sannyasin. He just wears a simple waist cloth for social reasons, because people are working there; swamis who supervise the work are coming in and out. Otherwise he has to live exactly like an avadhuta without any kind of cover.

The sadhana which is described for paramahansa sannyasins is different and varies according to the season. In summer, they have to sit underneath the sun with four fires around them. The temperature can go as high as eighty to ninety degrees centigrade. We used to wonder how he could survive the heat after his room had been constantly kept at twenty-seven degrees. How could he survive the heat of eighty-five to ninety degrees centigrade? How could he sit there for hours, months at a time without the heat adversely affecting his body?

One swami asked him about this and Sri Swamiji gave a reference to a scripture which said that only people who have overcome the fires that rage inside can survive the sadhana of the external fires. These five internal fires are *krodha*, anger; *lobha*, greed; *kama*, passion; *moha*, attachment; *mada*, arrogance. We were very inquisitive about the reasons for his sadhana.

From our analysis, we felt that only a person who has achieved a certain level of control over the natural elements and mind can survive such an intense routine. He is not a young person. He is not thirty or forty, he is nearly seventy. The body has a lot of limitations at that age, but not his body. He has never been sick despite the exposure to the elements. He sleeps on the ground, on a mattress of gunny bags, out in the open, no matter what the season.

It is an ongoing sadhana. In winter his routine is totally different; the practice of pranayamas. Last year he did about two hundred rounds of bhastrika a day; one round being twenty-one breaths through one nostril, twenty-one breaths

through the other nostril, and twenty-one breaths through both nostrils. He did eighty rounds of surya namaskara. When we do four or five rounds of surya namaskara the body hangs limp. His target was to reach one hundred and eight rounds of surya namaskara as a continuous practice. His winter routine is taking a bath at midnight and then sitting on the lawn in freezing cold air, and starting his sadhana from 2 am onwards.

To our minds it might sound a bit eccentric, extreme heat during summer, extreme cold during winter, but not for the mind of a sannyasin or yogi who knows the process of spiritual sadhana. They have to undergo that process. They have to come out of that stage in order to perfect the awareness of divinity, and at that moment every atom of the being is charged with cosmic energy and power. When he finishes his sadhana his body is just glowing. You cannot look into his eyes, they seem to go straight through you.

There have been people who have said that they cannot stay in his presence for more than just a couple of minutes. They have to get up and leave, they feel so uncomfortable. It is that raw energy glowing through the body. It is just unbelievable!

Can you say a few words about Sri Swamiji and how he has inspired you?

Sri Swamiji left Munger with the idea of again walking the sannyasa path. When a person takes sannyasa the first idea is to know oneself, to have God or self-realization, but in the course of time people become gurus, eloquent speakers, knowledgeable people, and they get caught up in the institutional family. What is the use of leaving a small family and saying, “I have renounced”, and still be filling out income tax returns and looking after the property of a bigger house with a bigger family. That is not renunciation. That is necessary only in order to work out one’s karmas.

Our aim, and this I have imbibed from Sri Swamiji himself, is always to walk with a vision and to perfect

ourselves. We can help others certainly, but without getting caught up in the mundane affairs of an institution, signing papers and looking after the comfort of the people who live and visit there. However, one generally loses track of the goal of life, the vision of life.

I am proud to be a disciple of a guru who never lost his vision. He worked hard for it, and then at a very late age when people look for comfort, luxury, support and security, he simply renounced everything. For me this is an inspiration. I am sure that for those who think in terms of yoga and having a yogic vision it is an inspiration also.

He has never gone back to a previous type of lifestyle. When Sri Swamiji left his home he did not look back, when he completed the training in his guru's ashram and left he did not look back, when he established the Bihar School of Yoga, worked hard for it and then left he did not look back. In his own words he will not look back if he has to leave the place where he is now, in Deoghar.

I feel greatly blessed to have had such a person who has given me a direction in life, who has said to me, "Look, you can do anything you want, but always have four tyres: artha, kama, dharma and moksha. Do not drive your car with two or even three, but try to move with all four."

When Sri Swamiji established the Bihar School of Yoga he worked for artha and kama. Now, he is working for dharma and moksha. Such a beautiful integration of these qualities and faculties I have not seen in anybody else.

The task you have been given as President of the Bihar School of Yoga is a great tapasya in itself, a complete sadhana. Do you find time to do a personal sadhana beside these duties?

Yes, I still do my sadhana which was given to me by Sri Swamiji when he initiated me into sannyasa.

Sadhana is not a matter for discussion. If it is given by the guru then it should be continued for as long as possible or until the guru changes it. It is an ongoing sadhana to unfold

the true nature of your personality. Yoga sadhana, such as asana and pranayama, can change, but not the sadhana which is given by the guru at the time of initiation.

When you feel that you have completed your sadhana or you have gone as far as you can in that direction, it is better to consult the guru as to what to do next. If the guru feels you should continue it, then you should do so with the same determination and conviction that you had on the first day.

This itself is a very great sadhana, to have the same aspiration, the same motivation and determination as you had on the day of your initiation. One thing that I cannot understand or even accept is that we lack the drive and inspiration to carry on with a sadhana because we associate it with a state of mental experience. I do not feel that any kind of sadhana should be confined just to a state of mental experience.

There are different kinds of sadhana: one which goes as deep as the physical body, another which goes as deep as the mind, and a third which goes as deep as the spirit. I am talking on a personal level in relation to sannyasa, not in general terms. When we are initiated as sannyasins, the sadhana which is given to us by the guru is not just body deep or mind deep; the aim is to reach the point of spiritual illumination. When we are passing through the layers of body and mind, that particular sadhana will at times feel irrelevant. Certain emotions, ideas or beliefs superimpose themselves on our drive and motivation of sadhana and we get diverted by their superimposition, so that we can never actually reach a point of spiritual illumination or understanding.

If, despite all the distractions and mental disturbances, we are able to continue with a one track mind in our sadhana, then it is my firm belief that the effort which we are putting into the sadhana will take us to the point for which it was initially given.

The sannyasa sadhana which was given to me by Sri Swamiji twenty-two years ago has not changed, and I do not

even think whether I have achieved anything or whether I have reached any point or not, that is irrelevant. It is like planting a fruit seed and taking it out every day to see whether it is sprouting, and then returning it to earth. If you keep examining that seed to see whether little shoots are coming out or not, lifetimes will pass and you will still be taking that one seed out of the ground every day.

If you just leave it there and take proper care of the environment then it is bound to sprout at the right moment. One lifetime is only a moment. So, I am convinced that in the span of eternity I will be realized in a moment, and I continue with my sadhana holding this knowledge before me.

Can you say something about giving?

Some who try to achieve purity through giving, often give in a moment of wastefulness, or as some kind of repayment for another time when they took; in other words, out of guilt.

Is it not better to simply be aware of the moment in its own uniqueness and participate either in the giving or receiving as the moment requires? For example, Shiva says, “Be not either here nor there, hot nor cold, but in between these.”

I agree with the idea. Giving and receiving are the two wings of one bird. No giving is complete without receiving, no receiving is complete without giving. This is a natural law. That is the belief of all spiritual traditions. A problem only arises in giving and receiving when we try to think of these concepts from our limited understanding and viewpoint.

This is a true story of something that happened in this ashram. Somebody once came to Sri Swamiji and said, “I want to devote myself exclusively to the spiritual path, take sannyasa, and surrender myself totally to you and God.” Sri Swamiji replied, “Well, it is not that easy. Are you willing to let go of your body, mind and spirit?” The man answered, “Is that all? I give them to you from today.” So Sri Swamiji continued, “Okay, we will try it. You will have to go through one test when you least expect it.” Years passed. The man had a house nearby, with a mango orchard. Sri Swamiji had

instructed him to continue living in his house for some time, till he felt that the time was right for him to leave.

One summer Sri Swamiji sent a sannyasin to his house with the following message, "Send some mangoes to the ashram." The swami went and delivered this message and then returned. The man came to the ashram after a couple of hours desiring to see Sri Swamiji. When he finally had the chance to see him, he said, "Did you send for mangoes?" Sri Swamiji smiled and said, "Yes." The man replied, "That is all very well for you to ask. I gave you my body, my mind and my spirit, but not my mangoes!" In a way, that story applies to each one of us.

There is always a point where we stop. We have a concept about giving, but we lack conviction and courage to follow something through with full determination and sankalpa. This is the problem of every human being on this planet. An intellectual concept is an intellectual analysis of one event, of a desire, liking or ambition. Letting go of oneself is not an intellectual concept. It is something which comes from the depth of one's heart.

In fact, I would say, there are four kinds of spiritual aspirants in the world. The best kind understands the principles instantaneously because they have an open heart. They realize the principles of spirituality and live those principles.

The next best is the person who understands the principles, but needs to analyze them a bit more, in order to integrate them into their life. It takes time. Compare the first category to gun powder; gun powder simply needs one tiny spark to ignite it. Compare the second to charcoal; once you light it, it takes time to heat up, to build up the fire, but it is sure and certain that the fire will be built.

The third kind requires many years of practice, and this aspirant goes through many ups and downs. This aspirant deals more with mental analysis of things, events and experiences. "This has happened, is it correct, incorrect, proper, right, good, bad? Should I, should I not?" This third

category is like wet charcoal. First it needs to dry, then it needs intense heat. It takes many years of practice, and for such people maybe even one lifetime is not enough.

The fourth type of aspirant has ambition and desire to achieve something in life, but no motivation. Things enter through one ear and come out through the other ear. There is no comparison of this fourth kind of aspirant with anything, no gun powder, no dry charcoal and no dripping wet charcoal. This fourth kind of aspirant is simply a waste of time. A waste of time for the guru, and a waste of time in life.

The desire to achieve something in life has to be transformed in a gradual way, so that one learns to open up internally. Our mind and life is like a computer, we are all working with DOS No. 2, version 2, and we want to upgrade our computer, so we get a new floppy, DOS version 3.2, or 4.0, or DOS version 5.0, but we do not want to crash the system before putting the new one in. Whilst having the old version of DOS, we wish to make our computer as effective as the one with DOS number 5.

I am sure that people agree with the concept of ‘crashing the mind’, but at the same time there is a very deep fear psychosis. This fear is attributed to having a lack of trust and faith. That is an intellectual concept, trying to find faults or a reason for not allowing us to let go completely. These faults are found in another person and not within oneself. But even faith and trust are not that important. Devotion is not that important, what is important is to have openness. It is this openness which brings simplicity in life. It is this simplicity that makes us aware of the right action or the right thing to do at the right time without relying on memory.

Memory is just a collection of impressions from the past. It is our built-in conditioning that uses experiences of past memories to plan for the future, without living in the present. There are very few people who can live totally, whole-heartedly and even whole-mindedly in the present. For many people the present does not even exist, because they are so caught up in past memories. Those past memories

create so much insecurity that the future becomes insecure, and looks dark and bleak.

Very few people, one in a million or trillion possibly, live with the totality of being, with the whole being in the present. If there is any kind of training which is fruitful in life, then it is the training of living in the present. If one were able to perfect the present without mixing it with past or future aims, ambitions and goals, then that person would be known as a perfect being. Believe me, it is not an abstract concept, it is a very practical one. Once we accept the present as it is, then new events and experiences will guide our actions, performance and destiny.

In the course of destiny one flows with the current of life. What do you do when you have to swim or take a raft downstream? While drifting down do you think of the turns and waterfalls that you have already passed? No, at that moment you think very much in the present. You are very alert and aware, observing the currents, the rocks, the depth of the water and what is happening in the immediate vicinity. When one's awareness is fixed in the present, then one cannot dwell even for a moment in the past or future. Spontaneity manifests, and giving and receiving become spontaneous. If I dwell in the past and think of the future, then giving and receiving is incomplete because there is conditioning in giving and there is also expectation in receiving.

Therefore, you should remember that common sense tells us to live in the present, so that the uniqueness of every moment is experienced. Once you begin to experience the uniqueness of every moment then the vision opens up, the heart opens up, the whole of life opens up and surrender becomes complete. It is an expression of the heart; not of the physical or mental heart, which is known as an emotion, but an expression of the transcendental heart which goes beyond any kind of logic, conditioning or habit.

It is very difficult if you consider that in order to be open one has to get rid of certain habits and conditionings. Due to these, it becomes very difficult to experience openness, as

habits are like scotch tape; the longer they have been stuck the more difficult it is to remove them. If you stick scotch tape on your skin now and remove it at once, it does not hurt, but if you remove it tomorrow it will pull all the hair out as well. If you remove it after some days, it will also pull the skin off.

There is a simpler way which does not require a change of lifestyle, habits or conditionings. This simple way is also an intense way which requires one to go deep into one's own personality and to strive for simplicity and openness.

What is the difference between spiritual ambition and other selfish ambition?

There is sattwic ambition, rajasic ambition and tamasic ambition and they are different in nature and intensity. Eventually one has to get rid of all these. Buddha used to say, "Use the desires and ambitions to know how they affect your being", but finally you have to give up even the desire to achieve realization. Only when that last desire is finished do you achieve it.

If you have a very wrinkled bedsheet, you get an iron and smoothen it out. Life is like that wrinkled sheet. The iron is whatever method you adopt, the steam is your willpower; these two iron out the sheet of life.

Can you explain the meaning of *Pinjare Vali Maina kirtan*?

In Vedanta philosophy the body is considered to be a cage wherein the spirit is enclosed. The spirit is perceived as being a bird having two wings. According to *Aparokshanubhooti*, one of the poetic treatises on Vedanta by Adi Shankaracharya, these wings are *vairagya* and *viveka*, *vairagya* meaning non-attachment and *viveka* meaning right perception. The soul or spirit, in the form of a bird possessing these two qualities, is enclosed in the body. The downward journey of the spirit is from the city of eternal love to the city of form and shape. The city of eternal love is known as *prempuri* or *premnagar*.

You have come from a plane which is full of love and you are going towards another dimension which is made out of *rupa* or form. This is the journey of the spirit. While this journey is being made, the bird, the spirit which is enclosed in the cage of the body, must remember the mantra *Sita-Rama, Radhe-Shyam*, and so on. That was the meaning of the kirtan. A book known as *Devi Bhagavatam* further explains this meaning.

Wars happen internally in the life of every person. In our personality there are fourteen qualities or gods that control and govern the different expressions or manifestations. They are known as *devas*, or the self-illuminated ones. Apart from this, we are influenced by the negative or the demonic qualities and tendencies which are millions in number.

It has been mentioned in many Upanishads, like the *Prashno* and *Mandukya Upanishads*, that each and every limb, sense organ and sensory faculty is controlled by a deva. For example, the eyes are controlled by the faculty of light, of the sun. The mind is controlled by the moon. Likewise, every organ has a presiding deity. However, at the time of mental disturbance and distractions these deities recede and the opposite negative quality then governs the personality, body, thoughts, emotions and feelings.

If you look at somebody with passion in the eyes, it is not Surya who is governing the vision, but Kama who has taken over the faculty of vision. In this way there is a constant conflict between the positive and the negative within the personality.

In order to become spiritually illumined it is necessary to have the senses and the mind under control. The eyes should see what is necessary for them to see and nothing more. The ears must hear what is necessary for them to know and nothing more. This process of discriminating what is necessary to know is the process of gaining wisdom. The tongue must only speak what is necessary to be spoken. The mind must only think what is necessary to be thought. If you allow these faculties to run without any kind of control, then

mental problems will come up in the form of worry, anxiety and tension.

Suppose two people are talking inside a room and you stand outside the door and try to listen to what is being said, or peer in through the glass to see what is happening inside. This represents a nature which is dissipated, which is not aware of itself but wants to compare things, to see what is being done, why it is not being involved, and so on.

One should be aware of one's actions and reactions, and they should all be controlled and guided by this self-awareness. Not a moment of life should be wasted on such useless pursuits as the extra-curricular activities of the senses and the mind.

This has been the emphasis of the yogic teachings also, that one should continuously and constantly live in the present. But how many of us live in the present? I do not think there is anybody who does so. We all live in the past, and we all have ambitions for the future, so we neglect the present. That applies to everybody: you, me, the whole world. We all waste our present time by worrying either about the past or the future. If one learns to ignore the past after having attained knowledge or wisdom from the accumulated experiences, and one forgets about future ambitions and tries to improve oneself in the present, then life will change drastically.

Gossip, ill-thinking about others, negative behaviour and slander, are the negative forces, the enemies which inhibit the growth of the personality. Once the fourteen deities recede from the personality, they go into the background, and these negative forces and qualities take over. There is no possibility of getting rid of them. In order to hide one lie you have to tell another lie, and in order to hide that one you have to tell a third lie. Once one negative quality or action has taken place it is followed by many other negative traits without your actual invitation. Therefore, the whole of life is to be considered as a very sacred and balancing walk towards the freedom of the spirit.

So, no gossip, please, no ill-thinking, no lies and slanders and no living in the past. Live in the present! People tend to ignore the question of awareness. When they leave the room, generally they do not switch off the light or fan. It does not take more than half a second to check the switches. Why should they be on when you are not in the room? It represents the level of awareness that we have.

Any excuse of work or rushing is an excuse which hides the personal weakness of every individual and an individual cannot progress until the awareness develops in regard to even simple physical things. Forget about spiritual life if you cannot develop your awareness on little matters like switching off the lights and fans when you leave the room. If you cannot do that much, you can forget about trying to meditate or to have realization, for you will never get it.

If we claim to be practitioners of yoga and followers of the sannyasa tradition with the aim of ultimately liberating the spirit from the body, then how can we ignore awareness which is expressing itself through the senses and mind? If you think that meditation is more important than remembering about the light switches, then I can guarantee that even twelve hours of meditation will not lead you anywhere. Do not ever, and I repeat, do not ever neglect such circumstances and conditions in life which can be used to enhance your awareness to the maximum. You can forget about sadhana, mantra, meditation and yoga, as long as you practise self-awareness. Self-awareness will eventually lead you to the culmination of yoga. That has been the aim of Sri Swamiji when he emphasized and over-emphasized the aspect of karma yoga. Not as a way to get the work done, because an industry can employ people to get its work done. An organization can employ people to get its work done. That is not the purpose. The purpose is to enhance the awareness which is localized and confined to our fantasies and wishful desires, and convert them into practical knowledge and understanding. That is the purpose of karma yoga.

You once said that a major cause of suffering in the world today is the lack of a philosophy that works. What philosophy would you offer?

I stand by that statement even today. So many people have tried to relieve the suffering of humanity and have failed, so what can I offer? I think that instead of a philosophy, it is better to offer oneself. Please do not take it in the sense that you are asking, "What philosophy would you offer?" and I am saying, "No philosophy, I am offering myself." No, not in that sense. I am giving you this answer because it is not the right time to speak about which philosophy is in store for all of us.

I do not believe that anybody has taught their philosophy in their lifetime. Philosophies are created after seeing the examples, lifestyles and actions of certain individuals. If Buddha came to earth today he would be really sorry about the plight of Buddhism. If Christ came to earth again he would be really sorry about the plight of Christianity. What we are propagating today is not what was in the mind of either of these great saints. The concept of life and living which these people had was based on simplicity of living and thinking, and not on a complicated maze of ideas.

I do not think I would be stupid enough to confine the ideas of yoga and spirituality into a maze of beliefs and concepts. I have no philosophy to offer in that sense. If I do have something to offer then I would repeat the same words that everybody has said before and that everybody will say again, "Empty yourself first before listening to my philosophy." If you cannot empty yourself, then do not ask what my philosophy is.

In different religions there is the concept of good and bad, God and the devil. What is the belief of yogic philosophy? Does the devil exist as an entity?

First of all, yogic philosophy does not believe in God, so why would it believe in the devil? In yoga, God does not exist except for Ishwara. Ishwara, or the non-decaying principle, is the final aim and state of human experience, a process of the

evolutionary growth of individual consciousness. According to this philosophy there is no devil, not in the evolutionary path, anyway. If we study the yogic tradition which speaks of the lokas, we can form an idea that in the world of duality there is bound to be positive and negative aspects of one reality. In the human plane, fortunately, the concept of the devil does not arise.

There are twenty-one dimensions of human experience, from the most primitive and instinctive to the most divine. It is said that the range of consciousness of a human being lies between mooladhara and sahasrara, the culmination point. We move from mooladhara to sahasrara.

Beyond sahasrara, there are seven more dimensions or *lokas*. In normal language they are known as the heavenly abodes. These lokas are *bhu*, *bhuva*, *svah*, *maha*, *janaha*, *tapaha* and *satyam*. They have been given a very prominent place in the Gayatri mantra and are described in the Apocalypse as the parting of the seven curtains. The experience of Ishwara is in the dimension of Satyam, which is the heavenly abode. Between the levels of mooladhara and sahasrara is the experience of the other six human dimensions.

Below mooladhara also there are seven dimensions which are known as patalas. There is a beautiful image of the devil in the lowest of the patalas. There is Ishwara in the highest of the lokas, the devil on the lowest of the patalas, and humans in mooladhara. If you go up from mooladhara, there is no devil, only divinity, but if you happen to go down from mooladhara, then there is that guy waiting for you with his trident. If you read about people who have had the worst kind of experiences in meditation, very few describe a vision of the devil, but many have described visions of angels, gods and goddesses.

There have been a few people like Buddha and Christ, the *poorna avatars*, who have experienced, seen, and encountered the devil. Christ was enticed by the devil on top of the mountain. This is a symbolic explanation that Christ was able to touch the lowest realms of human experience as

well as the highest. Similarly, Buddha was enticed by Mara before his enlightenment. Mara is the name of the devil in the Pali language; it also means death.

Only those who are able to experience the twenty-one dimensions of existence in one go encounter both the devil and divinity at the same time. We do not have to worry about it. We are lucky if we can just go from mooladhara to swadhisthana, and then to manipura, and on up to sahasrara. In this range there is no devil.

Are these times good for cooperatives in groups, or the initiatives of individuals?

In order to create force in any kind of work it is better that people, associates and friends, have the same motivation and direction. It is better if they share the same values of work and life. Only then will it be possible for cooperative or group work to flourish.

We encounter two kinds of situations in life. In one, the strength of a particular individual becomes the guiding force for the group to move forward. It happens in a nation. It happens in an ashram. The inspiration of one figurehead, whether it is the president, the prime minister or the guru, becomes the guiding force and channels the whole direction of the people associated. If there is dissipation of energy and focus then group work will never be successful.

Initially, the individual is of prime importance. It is the individual who has to think with clarity of heart and mind, and who possesses motivation which is unbiased, pure and simple. The individual must have the strength to convey that concept, energy, feeling and vibration. Once that vibration is imbibed by others who also share the same values, then group work definitely becomes a very vital force. It is just like a wave in the ocean which is small to begin with, but as it continues it gathers momentum, becoming bigger and bigger, so that by the time it reaches the shore a tiny ripple has been converted into a giant wave of great force and energy. First, the individual, then the group.

What is your vision concerning India?

I want to see a healthy and balanced India. That is only possible if there is a renewed cultural and spiritual awareness. There may be many different trends in India, but the one thing that unites a nation is its culture. Unfortunately, we take culture to be just dance, drama and music, but actually, according to the Hindi word *sanskriti*, culture means having a balanced or integrated performance of body, mind and spirit. We are working for that.

Sometimes, when students begin practices such as kriya yoga or uddiyana bandha, moolabandha or kapalbhati with moolabandha, they begin to have different kinds of memories, sexual drives or even drug desires. What is the reason for this and should they stop the sadhana, repress themselves or fulfil these desires?

There are four tendencies which are predominant in the human personality: *ahara*, a strong urge to eat, which is actually a search for satisfaction or fulfilment; *nidra*, the desire to sleep, and to escape unpleasant memories; *bhaya*, fear, our inability to find security in all conditions and situations of life; *maithuna*, the sexual urge, the deep-rooted inherent desire which is not human but divine, to become many, to multiply. These four tendencies are taken in a mundane rather than a spiritual sense, therefore they are not seen in their proper perspective.

The seed of these desires is within us. In meditation, a person who has never been fearful in life can suddenly experience intense fear; a person who has been celibate all his life can experience an intense sexual urge in the process of his sadhana; a person who is known for moderation in diet can become ravenous overnight. These different experiences can definitely manifest in the course of sadhana.

One of the effects of sadhana is that it purifies or removes the impressions of life, which bind us to this dimension: sensory, sensual, mental, emotional and so forth. As you go deeper within yourself, no matter how disciplined and

controlled life is externally, these four tendencies are bound to come up, in the form of memories, urges, desire for drugs, and so on. It is common, but at that time, the sadhana should not be stopped, nor should there be an indulgence or effort to fulfil such desires. It is at that moment that you have to be a witness of the influence and effect the desire is having on the mental, emotional and physical planes. Rather than going with the force of the desire, observe the effect and the intensity of that desire.

Once the intensity of the desire is reduced, then you have overcome one state of desire which consequently ceases to have any kind of influence or effect on your normal day-to-day personality. There is no suppression, there is no rejection, nor is there overindulgence, but there is observation and awareness of a desire. Once you have established yourself in a form of sadhana, and have transcended to the level where these things do not become an intense craving, you are free to do as you please, provided there is control over the mental attitude.

To understand this aspect of self-control, the 'left-hand' aspect of tantra needs to be explained. Tantra has many different systems. One system is known as *Vedachara*, the system as described in the Vedas. Second is *Dakshinachara*, translated as 'right-hand tantra' which follows the precepts of yoga. Third is *Vamachara* or 'left-hand tantra' which is so famous all over the world. This aspect of tantra describes the use of five items, meat, wine, grain, fish and sex. It also says that if drinking of wine leads us to enlightenment then every drunkard would be a self-realized person. If meat eating is the way to work towards enlightenment then every non-vegetarian in this world would be enlightened. If the physical sexual act is the way to achieve enlightenment then everybody would be enlightened.

These five items are not to be taken literally, in the way you have probably all taken them until now. It is a common and prevailing idea. There are many swamis who have built up huge institutions on the basis of these five ideas. They are

all wrong, and those people who believe them are idiots. I cannot understand how people can be such ignorant fools, to believe such rubbish regarding the human endeavour to transcend, or as part of sadhana. There are so many people who daily drink and eat meat, who have relationships, often illicit relationships, all the time. They fall into the worst category of human consciousness. The craving, the desire for pleasure, for more and more, that is not it!

Tantric literature further explains the meaning of this symbolism. What is the meaning of meat? What is the meaning of wine? What is the meaning of fish? One thing is very clear, that although tantra accepts the normal lifestyle, “Be what you are, live as you normally do”, at the same time, one has to maintain a higher state of consciousness. This is something people try not to read. They only read the lines that say, “Be what you are, live as you normally do.” They never read, “with a higher consciousness.”

The whole key to transcending the four aspects of ahara, nidra, bhaya, maithuna, lies in the statement “with higher consciousness.” It is this key that I am trying to explain, for even with the practices of kriya yoga, bandhas or any other yogic techniques which raise the level of consciousness and energy, there will be a change in the normal pattern of consciousness.

Once there is an unconscious fear, like fear of the unknown, which is very strong within us, even though we may not rationally acknowledge it, the fear of the unknown and of losing our normal identity, makes us doubly aware of such mental and physical experiences. The sexual drive is seen as a huge barrier. Fear is seen like a huge mountain which we have to cross. In reality, these are not as big as we make them out to be. If there is a deep feeling of fear and insecurity, it is quite possible that when such experiences come up, one can just go crazy or fall into states of depression and anxiety.

There was a swami here who had a similar problem. Externally he might say or do something, or act in a particular way thinking that was the right thing to do, but psychologically

he was undergoing a deep fear psychosis. This swami would run up to anyone and start calling them mother and father. Even little girls were called mother by him. He used to latch onto anybody and everybody who appeared in the ashram, totally attracted towards them. When you talked to him he would give you totally logical answers as if there was nothing wrong with him. He was not able to recognize this psychosis within himself. Ultimately, it became so bad, that I sent him out of the ashram. I am telling you this to describe a process where, once an idea or fear plants itself in the mind, it becomes an obsession and the rational mind does not recognize that idea as an obsession.

The rational mind thinks, “I am right and everybody else is wrong.” Such cases have to be dealt with very decisively. You cannot deal with such things gently. If you try to deal with them gently, there will be no solution in sight, it will only feed that false idea. So you have to deal with it very harshly. If you live with a guru, he will deal with you very, very harshly, coming to a point where there can be physical beating, just to break that pattern of thinking. Once the idea passes, then everything becomes clear and one begins to think, “I was really stupid to think that way.”

Awareness plays a very vital role here, where you do not let yourself become obsessed by an idea, whether it is of food, fear, sex or sleep. You observe them and through observation reduce their effect and influence on your personality. Do not indulge in the desires that come up; just be a witness.

Please clarify the difference between satya and asteya, as in English truthfulness and honesty mean the same thing.

These two Sanskrit words have separate meanings altogether. Satya is realization of truth and conviction of truth. This knowledge is not intellectual; it comes from the deepest possible conviction. In fact, truth is something that is never spoken, nor can it be spoken.

What we speak is not the truth; we do not have the conviction and the strength to believe in the right knowledge

and follow it all the way through. Therefore, it is my conviction that truth is never fully known. If it is known through the intellect only, then the courage to follow it through is lacking. It cannot be truth, as implied by the word 'satya'. Truth is not the idea of justice, of right and wrong, it is something which exists beyond the everyday reality and which is realized, not known through the intellect.

Asteya, or honesty, is the external manifestation of that truth. Honesty, or sincerity, contains within it, apart from the conviction of truth, the simplicity, purity and sincerity which manifests in external life. Living in the ever-present reality is truth, expressing that ever-present reality, from the core of one's heart, is honesty.

Is it possible that a samskara can reveal itself in a dream?

The mind seeks and creates its own images and ideas according to the sensory experiences it has recorded from the past. The Upanishads explain this in depth. To answer such a question, which cannot be understood rationally, we have to get help from the literature that describes the process. According to them, when the mind begins to create its own visual experiences in the state of dream, it can pull out different stored impressions from the consciousness, and samskaras can definitely be among them.

In the dream state it is very hard to recognize a samskara. Even when you are consciously aware in the waking state, trying to rationalize a dream is practically impossible. Dreams have a different function, of bringing out impressions and memories. Our rational aspect is not so well-developed that it can have the knowledge and understanding of mental or psychic experiences and impressions. Therefore, even when samaskaras manifest in dreams, they will be brushed aside by the intellect as something insignificant, ridiculous, or as something which we cannot understand. We say it is just a mental fantasy. In a sentence, samskaras can and do manifest in dreams, but there is no recognition of them, there is no awareness.

















Can you tell us about the naga tradition in India and also about the aghoris?

In brief, the sannyasa tradition is the original spiritual tradition of the world, maybe not in terms of wearing geru, shaving heads and living in an ashram, but in the sense that the word 'sannyasa' truly conveys.

What are the concepts that sannyasa conveys? Integrity within the self, harmony, equipoise, non-attachment, having a universal vision, improving the relationship with others to the extent where I become you and you become me; ultimately transcending the world of duality and experiencing oneness with everyone and everything.

Spiritual thinkers have always viewed this achievement as the final step that the body with its limited mind and brain can attain. Learning how to experience transcendental reality with the mind and the brain that we have been given is the actual teaching of sannyasa.

To reach this point we have to undergo a lot of preparation. In order to go through this preparation, we have to get away from many of the attractions and stimulations of the sensory and sensual world so that we can concentrate on one thing. Therefore, *tyaga*, the path of renunciation, was added to the concept of sannyasa. To concentrate on one direction, and to experience harmony within ourselves, we need to get rid of the petty distracting items of life by considering them to be non-essential and non-eternal.

In order to strengthen and complement *tyaga*, *vairagya* or non-attachment was incorporated, which means you are non-attached to the fruit or result of labour, desire, lifestyle or conditioning. *Tyaga* and *vairagya* became the foundation stones of the building called sannyasa. In a nutshell, this is sannyasa.

The aspirants of this path adopted a different kind of lifestyle which is not normal according to society; living away from society, with the bare minimum needs, not requiring shelter but living in caves, in the mountains and jungles, not requiring a market but living off fruits, berries and herbs that such isolated places provide.

According to their personality traits, they adopted a particular path. The path was generally yoga, tantra or Vedanta. Regarding yoga, some chose the path of bhakti, some of jnana, some of hatha, some of raja and the other yogas as well, including kundalini yoga.

The followers of tantra adopted the tantric practices of Vamachara, left-hand tantra; Dakshinachara, right-hand tantra; Vedachara, the path of the merger between the Vedas and the tantras. There are many different tantric paths, subdivided into categories such as Shaiva, Shakta, Saurya, Ganapatya, and so forth. The followers of Vedanta followed the path of jnana yoga: *advaita*, non-duality or monism.

Shankaracharya, who was the reformer of the sannyasa tradition, appeared on the scene at the time when everyone was beating their own drum. He said, "This is not what you have been taught. Sannyasa life is within the reach of everybody. Whether your path is tantra or Vedanta or yoga, do not claim it to be the final thing. Have a universal vision, be accepting and acceptable to different systems. Give them due respect, but follow a path according to your nature in which you do not deviate from the main aim of sannyasa. Keep your aim alive. At the same time help other people in society with similar aspirations and aims to know that there are certain options available."

Shankaracharya put the swamis and sannyasins into ten categories or divisions. Those who used to live in the mountains, in secluded spots, were known as Giris. Paramahansa Yogananda belongs to the Giri tradition. Swami Vivekananda belonged to the Puri tradition, from the lineage of Totapuri to Ramakrishna Paramahansa to Swami Vivekananda. *Puri* means a sannyasin who lives in a *pur*, a city, in the place prescribed for sannyasins, an auspicious place, temple precinct or ashram.

We belong to the Saraswati tradition. These ten traditions or categories of sannyasa represent the form of work which that order is supposed to do. Saraswati means being

responsible for the preservation, maintenance and propagation of *vidya*, the tradition of knowledge and wisdom. Saraswati is the goddess of learning.

Shankaracharya also prescribed a proper code of dress. Previously, ochre or geru, white, red and black were accepted as the clothes of renunciates. He said that those who belonged to the Dashnami Order, the ten categories, were to wear geru to represent the tradition of sannyasa. Those who belonged to the tantric tradition were to dress in red or black. Those who belonged to the vedic tradition were to dress in white, yellow or orange, for evolution within the social structure of sannyasa. The aspirant first becomes a jignasu or novice. He then adjusts his lifestyle, fresh from outside, into an ashram or spiritual environment, as a karma sannyasin where he lives as a kutichaka. Then he progresses to the bahudaka stage, followed by poorna sannyasa. Then comes paramahansa, avadhuta and turiyatita. These were the different gradations of personal growth in sannyasa sadhana, where there is a life of higher experience and reality beyond this madhouse. Thus, the concept of sannyasa has really evolved and become consolidated.

Sannyasa, as the original spiritual ideal of humanity, is the means to experience the relationship and harmony that exists between body, mind and soul, and between individual consciousness and universal vision. Sannyasins who tried to realize that ideal adopted the course of *tyaga*, renunciation, and *vairagya*, non-attachment.

This concept of spirituality became a point of attraction for the various doctrines or systems of different cultures, times, countries and people. They later became known as tantra, yoga and Vedanta, the three main systems or techniques adopted by a sannyasin to experience sannyasa. Many adopted the tantric systems, many adopted the yogic systems, many adopted the vedantic approach. They became the different sannyasin sects or the *sampradaya*, a group of individuals having a similar pattern of thought. This stage continued for many hundreds of years.

Then Shankaracharya appeared on the scene. He gave the sannyasa tradition a code of conduct in society, for society, and for the individual sadhaka in seclusion. He said that, ultimately, all systems and paths lead to realization of one's divine or transcendental qualities. Therefore, pursue your own path, but have respect for others who are following their path; Brahman as reality exists in all strata of life.

In each stage of sannyasa there is a different state of consciousness, a different way to observe and interact with life, externally and internally. As a jignasu, which is the first basic stage in sannyasa life, one should strive to reach a level where the pull of external or dissipated and distracted desires are gradually reduced, and one desire becomes the guiding light of the efforts that we are going to make in the future. By nature we are extroverted. To achieve a level of concentration where there is no kind of dissipation, a process will have to be started. It is a process of gradually pulling back the externalizing sensory faculties and focusing on one point. This should happen at the level of jignasu.

As karma sannyasins we must strive to attain a degree of balance between external social life or involvement with the world, and the internal need for balance and tranquillity, perfection and coordination in mental life. Karma sannyasa becomes a method of reminding ourselves that we are not to be swept away by the attraction of the external sensorial world. We have to maintain a balance between optimum external performance and the sense of internal harmony: mental, intellectual, analytical, emotional and sensual.

This training begins with the stage of *kutichaka*, living in a community. An ashram is a place of kutichakas. Within the group of kutichakas there is a filtration. Those with the idea that "I can implement outside what I have learnt here", become bahudakas; those who, either as karma sannyasins or sannyasins, intermingle with every physical, material manifestation with a balanced mind.

In the bahudaka and sannyasin stage there is strengthening of an idea, an idea that a sannyasin's commitment is

to one's own self for attaining vidya on all levels: physical, intellectual, emotional, psychic, causal, subtle, vibrational, on every dimension.

From sannyasa one moves to the hamsa stage. *Hamsa* is generally considered as a swan or a person having the ability to glide through the waters of the world without getting wet. It is that self-attained ability to be in the world, to interact with the world but not to become a part of it, rather to maintain a distinct identity.

After this is the paramahamsa stage. A paramahamsa is a person who can keep the awareness of a separate identity, the atmic identity, distinct and different from that of body and mind, ego and memory, consciousness and unconsciousness. A paramahamsa is a person who can also help others with similar aims and aspirations. The description of a paramahamsa is, 'Flying through the air, knowing no limits, where the rules of society are not binding and where one is free'.

After paramahamsa comes the stage of avadhuta. For an avadhuta the world becomes a shelter, not a room made out of bricks and cement. The sky becomes his roof, the directions of north, south, east and west become his four walls. His bed is the earth, not a Dunlop mattress or a water bed. In this stage there remains no attachment to the body. The body works within its own limits and karma. His mind is all-powerful and he has the willpower to actually move material manifestations like mountains, having control over nature and the forces of nature.

After avadhuta comes the stage of turiyatita, transcendence of the three levels of existence: gross, subtle and causal. When established in turiya, one is nothing but a manifestation of pure light. These were the grades that a sannyasin had to pass through before he could actually be called a sannyasin.

The word *swami* means 'master of the self', and one who has done a PhD and earned a doctorate of Swami. The PhD was done on paper as theory, feasible theory, with the possibility of having mass utility. Now that thesis has to be

converted into reality, and the word 'swami' is a reminder of that. Initiation is just the beginning of converting the thesis into reality.

The swami ideal was later changed into the concept of *tyagi*, a renunciate who has no need for any physical, mental or emotional satisfaction. The body, mind and emotions function as per the harmony that exists between them.

After *tyagi*, the same sannyasins converted into *naga*, which literally means 'naked'. Due to the literal meaning many people actually remain naked throughout the year without any covering on their body. There are some people who practise the *naga sadhana* as a process of self-perfection. This nakedness however is internal. The sannyasin's life becomes an open book, a bestseller. Look what happened to Christ. He has become a bestseller. Buddha has become a bestseller, Sri Krishna has become a bestseller.

Naga is a *sadhana*, but people have also taken it literally to be a way of life. A person who can incorporate that *sadhana* into a way of life is known as *naga*.

The highest title that a sannyasin or swami can achieve is *Brahmarshi*, the seer of Brahman, one who has experienced, is experiencing and will continue to experience, the expansive nature of Brahman.

A similar tradition existed in tantra. From the body of tantra, five definite systems have developed. One system is known as *Vedachara*, the combination of the tantric precepts and the vedic precepts, creating a harmony between the two. *Vedanta* is the path of Brahmic awareness and tantra is a path of external harmony with the higher Self.

The second path is *Kaulachara*, the tradition that exists within a family, where the mother or another female, as the representative of *Shakti*, the cosmic energy, is the supreme person. She is responsible for sustenance and maintenance of the family house and for social maintenance of law and order. In this second path, women were also the gurus.

The third path is *Vamachara*, the left hand path of tantra. From *Vamachara* two different sects were derived: the *Aghora*

sect and the Dakshinachara sect. The latter is the tantric system of esoteric practices of which yoga is also a part. Yoga was incorporated into tantra naturally and spontaneously, as it presents the possibility of attaining the same harmony and perfection with a greater sense of discipline and commitment.

After the Dakshinachara path came the fifth path of Siddhantachara, the code of conduct of the different doctrines which can unfold according to various experiences. The Upanishads became part of Siddhantachara. These Upanishads belonged to the Shaiva, Shakta, Saurya and Ganapatya traditions. The elephant's head is representative of a developed and enlightened intellect. It is a mythological representation of what every human has the potential to become. These were the five systems of the tantras or the aghoras.

Aghora is a sect belonging to the Vamachara tradition; Kapalikas are also a sect belonging to the Vamachara tradition. Kapalikas are those who wear human skulls around their necks as a reminder that the life of which we are so proud will one day be nothing but a skull. Aghoras have attained the harmony between positive and negative. They can eat anything and everything, a handful of earth can become a very delightful morsel of food for them.

How can yoga help us to improve the performance of our minds, emotions and behaviour in everyday life?

We try to achieve perfection in every level of our life, to improve our actions, our behaviour and our thinking patterns, but we find that there are many limitations and setbacks. We are not able to understand the different patterns of manifestation of consciousness, or of our personality, and we are unable to handle the influx of information that is constantly being received by our consciousness. Modern psychology tells us that only thirty-three percent of the brain is active at present, and of that only ten percent is functioning. The other ninety percent is in a totally dormant state.

This inability to understand what is happening leads to tension. External factors such as work, family and society create stress and anxiety; however, apart from these there are certain other factors which influence our personality. When there is a prolonged state of tension inside, it will automatically influence the body. We suffer from physical and psychological tension, emotional anxiety and stress which in the long run are detrimental to our existence and hamper the process of expansion of consciousness and energy.

Here consciousness and energy are two important keywords. If we want to have a progressive mind and life, we need to expand our mind and consciousness; we need to awaken the dormant inherent energies. In yoga, in order to achieve this awakening, we start with the body. Once we have dealt with the body, we work with the mind. Then, when we begin to work with our mind, we start to understand the roles we adopt in society and play each part effectively. In this way we can eliminate one hundred percent of all our frustrations, problems and anxieties.

Tension in our mind influences our body and the functions of the internal organs. Whether we create tension voluntarily or involuntarily, changes occur in our physiological and psychological systems. When problems arise involuntarily due to events over which we have no control whatsoever, that also unconsciously affects the efficiency of the body and mind. Try to create a problem or a tension voluntarily and you will find it out for yourself. When we suffer physiologically due to some illness or disease, it influences the workings of our mind, thoughts and emotions. We call this type of problem somatopsychic, problems that begin with the body and influence the mind. Problems that begin with the mind and influence the body are called psychosomatic and have to be dealt with in the right perspective. A healthy body and mind is very important for the balanced growth of the personality.

In yoga a healthy body does not mean a muscular body; it means that all the systems working in proper order. A

healthy mind in yoga means a tension-free mind which is trying to break through the boundaries of its limitations and go beyond the normal day to day programming to which we have been subjected since the time of birth. To attain this healthy body and mind is the aim of yoga. When there is harmony in our body, in the functioning of our physiological systems, such as the central nervous system, respiratory system, cardiac system and so on, then this harmony on the physical level influences the brain.

There is a direct link between the body and the brain, and the brain and the mind. In the brain, many events are constantly taking place which shape the future activities, actions and reactions of the body and mind. When there is harmony in the physiological structure, this induces the state of relaxation in the brain, which directly influences our thinking patterns and our behaviour.

We all know of the brain waves. They are four in number: beta, alpha, delta and theta. These brain waves are electrical impulses which represent the different states of body and mind. An active body and an alert, active mind is represented by the beta wave. A relaxed body and a relaxed mind is represented by the alpha wave. A relaxed body, yet active and concentrated mind is represented by the delta wave. An active yet relaxed body with acute awareness, brilliant awareness, is represented by the theta wave. We all go through the different functioning patterns of these waves in our day-to-day life, but we are not aware of it.

There is a system which is known as biofeedback. In this system, we manipulate the brain waves in order to understand and develop the different qualities that are attributed to the functioning of the brain.

I will give an example. When I was in the US, some scientists came to the ashram and wanted to hook me up to a biofeedback machine to see what was happening inside my brain. I said, "All right, go ahead." They put electrodes all over my body. I was just sitting there doing nothing and the machine showed a zero response. They thought at first

that the machine was defective. A zero response is usually only received from a dead body, so they thought I must be a living zombie. I said that I was very far from being a living zombie, please could they try again. They did try again, but still nothing happened.

I myself was interested as to what was happening as it was something I had never known or encountered before. They then tried all of the different settings of the machine until eventually they just gave up. Suddenly, one of them had a bright idea. He said to me, "Try and stimulate your mind." I replied, "How?" He said, "Think of something pleasant." I said, "Okay, I will think of something pleasant," and as soon as I said this the needle on the dial jumped. Then they said "Think of something terrible, a tragedy that has happened to you in your life", to which I replied that I had never faced any tragedy in my life. They said, "Well, think of something very negative. Try to imagine that something very terrible is happening." I imagined something of that kind and the needle jumped again. I asked them what was happening to the machine because I was in a very normal frame of mind. They told me that they had found with every yoga practitioner, that even though they seemed to be active and alert on the outside, their brain was not connected to their bodies.

I did not understand this at the time. How can a brain not be connected with the body? After some years, I had the chance of discussing this with Sri Swamiji and he said that he also had had the same problem when he was hooked up to a similar machine. The reason for this is that in our body there are two systems, the motor nervous system and the sensory nervous system, which are related to the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. The information that is being received by the brain through the senses via the sensory nervous system is being processed at a different level of consciousness.

This fact was proved by the Japanese scientist, Dr Motoyama. He discovered that when we reach a state of

relaxation and harmony in our physical system, then the input which is being received by the brain is processed at a very different level.

I have been unable to understand what this different level is. The responses that the brain transmits are sent from a different area of the mind, so visibly there is no link between the body and the brain, or between the brain and the mind. In the traditional literature of yoga, it is also said that when we reach the state of *turiya avastha* there is a disassociation between the mind and the object. *Turiya avastha* is a state of consciousness whereby we are alert inside and outside, both at the same time; simultaneously we are aware of the external world and the internal world.

There are two processes. One involves having proper judgement, which comes with an expanded mind; the other involves having improper judgement, which comes due to a limited and restricted mind. For example, if I put my fingers in a flame, I will feel a burning sensation. This will stimulate a message to my brain and in one millionth of a second the brain will have to decide what to do. It will send a response back saying, "Remove your hand, it is burning." This is proper judgement. Now what will happen if the brain does not send out this response? You will leave your finger there and your finger will get burnt. This is an improper judgement involving disassociation, which is a negative response. This is an example of the different states of consciousness which occur daily without our being aware of them. Once we begin to become aware of them, however, we realize the potential that is inherent within us and we learn how to utilize it.

The purpose of yoga is not just meditation or self-realization. That is the philosophical approach to yoga. The practical approach to yoga is to have a state of harmony and equilibrium within the body and mind. It is not important whether we begin with asana, pranayama, relaxation or meditation. Human beings have different tendencies, personalities and qualities. All the practices of yoga are

not uniformly used by these different types of people. The practices have to change according to the needs of each individual and fulfil the requirements of each stage they are experiencing.

People come to yoga for many reasons: health reasons, preventative reasons, for greater energy and awareness. Some people come because they want to learn how to relax and eliminate tensions. Others come because they want to learn how to meditate with spiritual aims. The practices need to be tailored to suit individual requirements. In general, however, what we all need is a state of body and mind where we can perform actions with the total efficiency of the personality.

Kriya yoga appears to involve a fair amount of auto-suggestion and imagination. This process leads to a state of self-hypnosis, a method now widely used in the western world to control psychosomatic illnesses such as bronchial asthma, various types of phobias, and even to cure bad habits like smoking and eating too much. How does this process of auto-suggestion help to open parts of the brain that are not functioning?

I have nothing against hypnosis, self-hypnosis or auto-suggestion, but certainly the effects of kriya yoga cannot be put into that basket, for one simple reason. In auto-hypnosis the brain waves work on the alpha pattern, whereas in kriya yoga they work on theta and beta patterns. When you do any practice which has the elements of auto-suggestion, the brainwaves show an intensity of alpha and finally delta patterns when you go into deep sleep, which means the brain, the nervous system and the body are acting on a different type of metabolism and a different effect is taking place in the physical body.

There is nothing wrong in these methods, because people do need hypnosis and auto-suggestions to improve their habits, to give up smoking and many other things, and there are elements in raja yoga which are parallel to hypnosis, especially pratyahara. Pratyahara is the fifth step of raja

yoga: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama and then pratyahara, in which you withdraw the senses; I would even use the word 'hypnosis'. I do not mind, because the word 'hypnos' is Greek for sleep, and naturally in sleep conditions the delta waves are there, not theta and beta waves.

However, when you practise kriya yoga you are not dulling your senses. You are not making your senses retire or relax. You are not influencing your sympathetic, parasympathetic or central nervous systems, neither ida, pingala nor sushumna. The awakening of sushumna is the major factor related to kriya yoga. Ida and pingala are the two nervous systems in yoga, which can be understood in the context of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, one controlling the *karmendriyas*, the motor organs, the other controlling the *jnanendriyas*, the sense organs. Then there is the third major nadi, which is called sushumna nadi. Awakening of sushumna is the awakening of the central nervous system. When the central nervous system begins to operate, then naturally the brain also begins to function fully.

The first point is that kriya yoga should not be equated with hypnosis even though we do acknowledge the immense benefit which we can reap from the practices of hypnotism or auto-hypnosis and auto-suggestion. When we practise kriya yoga we are not practicing auto-suggestion, as we practice moolabandha, shambhavi mudra, uddiyana bandha, vajroli and ujjayi pranayama which are not subjective practices. They are objective and have a direct bearing on the physiological structure. Moolabandha has its physiological effect on the body as does uddiyana bandha, shambavi mudra, nasikagra drishti, and so on.

If a person is subjected to scientific investigation while he is practising kriya yoga what will the result be? In short, first the brain wave patterns will slow down and come to alpha level. That is perfection in pratyahara. Gradually, while the alpha pattern is operating, the brain waves will change to theta. When you practise deep meditation for ten, fifteen or thirty minutes, the theta patterns begin to emerge which

means that after having obtained a perfectly relaxed state of body, an awakening is taking place.

This awakening does not take place when you are restless, but when you are not disturbed at all. When you are disturbed, your mind is wandering, you are restless, anxious and worried about things. Some sort of awakening can take place at that time. You can become angry, violent or hyperactive. From here, when the alpha waves become activated, the first relaxation is obtained, followed by physical relaxation, psychological relaxation, and emotional relaxation.

Relaxation can occur in every part of the body, including the heart, the nervous system, and the brain. When the relaxation is complete, that awakening begins, and the brain shows the theta patterns. Therefore, kriya yoga should be considered as a method of awakening, not as a method leading to auto-hypnosis.

Please tell us something about body-breath awareness and the corresponding brain activity.

Breathing is a deep internal process that can be used to focus attention. The problem in meditation is that we need to have a focus for our attention. The breath is just one place on which to put the attention.

If you place your consciousness on any part of the body, it will enliven the prana in that part. As soon as you put your mind onto an outer or inner part of the body, you simultaneously link up the outer cortex with the inner brain. You start to create these deep internal connections. The breath is the only internal process on which you can put your awareness.

I am trying to get away from the concept of physiology being a labelling of parts. It is much more important from a yogic point of view to bring it to an experiential level. We should begin to experience our own body, our own physiology. That is why Ayurveda is so good; it talks in terms that help us to really begin to see and experience our body.

Would you say that there is a general and a specialized yoga?

There are two approaches to yoga. One is general knowledge and one is specialization. You can get general knowledge of physics in schools and colleges, but if you want to specialize then you have to concentrate on just one subject. You cannot say, "I am going to specialize in botany, but at the same time I want to specialize in physics." It is not possible.

In yoga the approach is the same. What we are doing is general yoga, but if we are to go deeper into some aspect of yoga then the personality traits do not count. We have to go through the process of relearning and perfecting until we become perfect. This is specializing in yoga.

Those people whom we label hatha yogis or raja yogis, have excelled in their particular system or have developed their own approach to yoga through personal experience and understanding.

What do nagas do? How do they live? Please give details of their tradition?

When I was telling you about the sannyasa structure I also told you of the vedic tradition, the tantric tradition and the five systems of tantra: Vamachara, Dakshinachara, Siddhantachara, Vedachara and Yogachara.

The nagas are sadhakas who practise both right-hand tantra, Dakshinachara, and left-hand tantra, Vamachara. You will find both Shaivas and Shaktas among the nagas. In the Dakshinachara and the Vamachara aspect of the nagas they have to learn an oral tradition. Their only aim in life is to control their four passions or instincts: *kama*, sexual desire; *bhaya*, fear; *nidra*, sleep; and *ahara*, food.

Passion means total absorption. If there is total absorption in fear, the whole body can freeze momentarily and stop functioning. In sensuality there is also complete absorption: passion. To maintain the physical body it is necessary to consume the food which nature provides, but not to have greed. This also becomes a point of absorption for them.

Often naga sadhus actually bury themselves head first in the ground, bottoms up sirshasana fashion in the sand and go into states of samadhi and liberation. Many nagas sleep on a bed of nails; we call them fakirs and they worship Kali, Durga or different forms of Shiva, the avatars of Rudra, including Hanuman. In this way, they have many different sadhanas. Some fast continuously. Some perfect their pranayama to such an extent that they can live on air. This is the sadhana of the nagas.

Opposite to the nagas are the aghoris. Aghoris are pure left-hand tantra worshippers of Shakti. They live in cremation grounds and have a human skull as their begging and eating bowl. They appear to be ferocious. They can eat anything, even a dead person; they have no fears or revulsion.

Aghoris are siddhas. They have powers. They can turn meat into a beautiful sweet dish. There are many stories of seekers who contact the aghoris. The aghoris ask them to do many abominable things, such as eating their own faeces, drinking the urine of other people. By the time it reaches the mouth it has become something different altogether!

There was a sadhaka in Bengal, Paramartha, who used to chase after aghoris and nagas to find out what their abilities were. He saw a female aghori lying under a tree; fat, ugly and horrible looking. He passed by her. She called out to him and when he turned around she was a beautiful, voluptuous girl. She converted back into her other form and asked him to eat the arm of a dead body which was burning in the fire. He would not eat it, so she fetched the arm, put it in a thali and it became a beautiful dish of rice, dal and sweets. This is a true story. It does happen.

Aghoris can bring the dead back to life. They have that power, but they do not display the siddhis which they have. Aghoris live like mad people, with dishevelled hair and clothes that are dirty, smelly, ugly and putrid.

Maybe if there is another opportunity to come back to this planet and God asks me, "Do you have any wishes to be fulfilled?" I will say, "Yes. One. Make me an aghori."

It is a world of magic in which they live. We live in a world of nature; they live in a world of magic.

You have said on a few occasions that when you feel the pressure of your responsibilities, you just remember that Sri Swamiji has given you this duty. Do you not have a sense of the greatness of your own destiny as a spiritual leader in your own right?

If you want a straight answer, it is “No.” I do not have a sense of the greatness of my own destiny, nor do I consider myself a spiritual leader in my own right. I have thought a lot about it, and I have looked at the experiences and read the autobiographies of many saints and sages of the eastern as well as the western traditions. It has been clear to me in those studies that having the sense of greatness, or thinking oneself to be a spiritual leader, is a symptom of one’s bloated ambition and desire. I do not claim that I do not have this bloated ambition, but I have been careful about it. I try not to have it.

Another thing which is important is, if I cannot fulfil the role of a disciple in the truest sense, then how can I ever be a master in my own right. One does not become a master overnight. Mastership or spiritual leadership is not a process of becoming, it is a process of being, and once you are that, then it is a spontaneous expression in life.

If one tries to have an artificial mastership and be what one is not, that is falsehood, crookedness and against every kind of spiritual, moral or religious belief. So no, I do not have such feelings. In fact nobody would be happier than I if I had to step down today, and forget about such duties or responsibilities. This could be a reason why, when I feel burdened with different things, I feel that I have to fulfil a role because it has been assigned to me. The swamis here know that given the first opportunity I would be sitting at the back listening and not on the stage talking.

This is something which I feel I have imbibed from Sri Swamiji. He has stated many times, “I do not feel or consider

myself to be a guru, although my disciples claim that I am a guru." These are the words of Sri Swamiji: "I feel that every moment, in every step of my life and in my search, I am just a disciple being guided and inspired by my guru Swami Sivananda." I experience similar sentiments very strongly.

I feel that sometimes the guidance and inspiration is coming from another source. The thoughts, desires or ambitions are not mine. If I want to be anything in life then I would just wish for one thing, to be a true disciple, that is all. I do not wish to be a sadhaka because that is too long and arduous a journey, and too self-centred: "Where am I? Now what do I do next?", "I have had this experience; is it right, is it wrong?" No, this is too difficult for me. Guruship is definitely out. Discipleship is something which I like and prefer. If I can be the instrument through which a beautiful harmony is played in the hands of a master player, that is enough. I do not want to be the master player.

What happens if you do certain yoga practices too early?

If you do yoga practices too early it is of course no good. You should do them when the time is right. You have to do what is appropriate for your need. This is common sense yoga.

If, for example, you practise techniques which are inappropriate for you, because for some reason you do not get information about what is happening in your body, or because you do not recognize what is going on and you are pushing too hard, or you get the information but you block it for egotistic reasons, then you are going to hurt yourself in one way or another. A lot of people come to me with various problems as a result of having practised yoga incorrectly. Bits of bones pop out, they lose the feeling in the right arm, etc. It is incredible!

As you go through each successive stage of practice you get to more and more refined levels of perception and information. This attitude that people have of saying, "Well, I have done that, I have done asana, now I can do pranayama, and so on" is not the right approach if they deny the basic rules of yoga.

These systems build on each other and have to be held together. When that happens, you unblock the gross structures through asana, the next level through pranayama, and the next level through bandha, then you get to an information level where you can feel intracellular information. This is the level where you start to know about mudras. It is getting to a level of attitudinal influence of tissue.

Up to now I have not been able to find out the exact meaning of the following words, could you please clarify them: I, self, ego, spirit, mind, intellect, brain and cleverness?

According to yoga the brain is the physical organ which controls the stimulation of the senses and directs the activity of body and mind on the physical dimension. The brain comes under the category of *sthula* or gross, being a physical organ. In the state of *sukshma*, the subtle dimension, is included the mind, intellect, ego and the aspect of chitta. These four aspects are known collectively as the *antahkarana*. *Antah* means internal and *karana* means the cause of experiences in this world.

The world is always perceived and acknowledged by manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. *Manas* is literally translated as the mind. Not the mind that we know in relation to psychology, nor the individual mind which has been divided into conscious, subconscious and unconscious, but the mind as a faculty of consciousness which relates an experience with a situation existing externally; the mind which we are using right now to listen and think. Manas is in continuous contact with the environment and the events which are happening around us.

The subtle aspect of manas is known as *buddhi* or intellect which is an in-depth process of the mind, a faculty through which we can withdraw the knowledge relevant at the present time and leave the rest in the knowledge bank. The function of buddhi is to analyze, compare, classify and store

information in the knowledge bank. The buddhi faculty can be conscious as well as unconscious.

There are many things which we are aware of unconsciously. Without our knowledge they are being received, absorbed, analyzed and categorized by buddhi. Just like the rays of the sun falling on the body, it is not a conscious process of awareness. With the experience of heat, warmth and coolness there is no conscious recognition. It is an unconscious process which is being received, analyzed and classified as a certain type of experience before it is stored. The conscious process on the other hand is related to the immediate condition which is now prevalent. For example, what I am saying right now is being analyzed in relation to your present understanding.

After buddhi comes chitta. *Chitta*, in the context of this question, is the self; not the lower or higher self, not the self with a capital 'S' but the self as the faculty which is active, alert and in control of the physiological, psychological and spiritual structure. This self which is all-knowing is slightly different from the concept of the higher and lower self.

Ego, the fourth subtle attribute of the mental dimension, is the awareness of the physical identity: I am this body, I am this mind, these are my achievements, these are my failures, these are my likes and dislikes, this is how I wish to be and how I do not wish to be. This kind of self-image and development is governed by the ego. The causal dimension is where 'I' is the main aspect. This 'I' is a combination of both the lower and higher selves. The lower self deals with the world of cause and effect and the higher self deals with the urge to go beyond, to transcend. These two are the attributes of 'I', cause and effect, action and reaction. The result relates to all the different manifestations in creation.

The range of cause and effect begins and ends in the realm of elements. The ether, air, fire, water and matter elements are subject to change, action and the results of the action. Yoga says that not only is the body composed of the five elements, the subtle aspect of our personality or the

mental experiences are also made up of the subtle elements. The mind is the ether element. Ego is ether and air. Chitta is ether, air and fire. Buddhi is ether, air, fire and water. Manas is all the five elements.

Different combinations and permutations of these five elements create a set of experiences. The lower self governs the realm of the elements while the higher self is aware of dimensions beyond the elements. The higher self belongs to the realm of consciousness and of energy which have not gone through any kind of change. Therefore, the lower self is subject to action and result, cause and effect, whereas the higher self is just moving on in the evolutionary path. This is the aspect of 'T', which is the *karana sharira* or causal body.

Spirit is the transcendental experience of the faculty of energy which exists in the manifest as well as in the unmanifest dimensions. It is the underlying energy in every aspect of creation, the force behind the manifestation of the world that we see and perceive, behind the experiences which are invisible and transcendental.

In relation to this question, spirit comes first as it belongs to the transcendental dimension. Then comes the 'T' in the form of the lower and higher self, which has the four attributes of ahamkara, chitta, buddhi and manas. Then follows the physical structure, which includes the brain with its cleverness.

When I try to visualize a flame or another symbol at the eyebrow centre, I can only see patterns of colour. However, I have no trouble in visualizing random thoughts and recollections in glorious technicolour. Why is this so and are there yoga techniques to cultivate this faculty of wilful visualization?

The mind should concentrate on the psychic symbol in order to complete the cycle of mantra. This psychic symbol can take any form according to the sound vibration. Every kind of vibration can create a shape. Every musical note can create a pattern in sand, a geometrical figure or picture.

Experiments have been conducted on different mantra sounds, consonants and vowels of the Sanskrit language, and although no in-depth study has been made, the basic principles are known.

The symbol which is given at the time of mantra initiation represents the shape of the vibration and frequency of the mantra, and the form that it will adopt naturally and spontaneously. This form is inherent in the consciousness. Many people will have noticed that while practising normal meditation without any symbol, in the course of their sadhana, perhaps after five or ten years as they intensify awareness of the mantra, an image superimposes itself on the mind in chidakasha. Later on, when they ask for a symbol, they recognize it as being the one which was observed. They feel that it came to them naturally.

I can verify that this is bound to happen, because that sound vibration creates a diagram in your consciousness. This diagram can be a yantra, a tiny symbol like a star or a moon, a river, a stream or an ocean. Symbols are related very closely to the mantra.

Initially you may not be able to concentrate on the symbol because of the distraction of the mind and awareness. This is an important point to remember. Only when you have perfected the awareness of the mantra do you use the symbol. In order to intensify that depth of awareness, when you begin to use the symbol, it will only be a process of imagination, unless it comes up spontaneously from within. The distracted frame of mind which retains different kinds of memories will show those memories in glorious technicolour. In the concentrated or one-pointed state of mind, you are trying to see the symbol which is the vibration of a sound. It may not be seen in technicolour in the first few weeks or months of practice.

The process of visualization is only imaginative at first. However, as your concentration intensifies you may see a dark, unclear, hazy outline of the symbol. Maybe you will have flashes in a solid form and colour that remains there

for a few moments. It begins to move up and down, left and right and to dance the dance of Shiva. With continued effort, as you gain further depth of consciousness, awareness and concentration, that symbol will become part of your being. Later on, it will come to the stage where even with your eyes open you will be able to see it.

I have had this experience. There was a time when my symbol awareness became very intense and even with my eyes open I could wilfully block out the images in front of my eyes and see the symbol covering my entire vision. Whenever I wanted to I could make it disappear and retrieve my normal vision. That stage can only be achieved with constant, continuous and regular practice.

It takes time, so do not be in a hurry. Give yourself plenty of breathing space. Allow plenty of time for these things to work within you. I am sure that one day, when you can be yourself, you will hit the bullseye. If you are under-confident you will not hit it. Similarly, if you are over-confident you will not hit it. Give yourself time to be yourself. Again and again, I repeat, and will die repeating, do not expect things to happen immediately!

Can we cultivate faith on a daily basis?

The freshness of life can only be experienced with awareness of the freshness of each new day. We have lost the ability to flow with life, to interact and live with life. Our lives have become mechanically programmed by society, culture, belief, religion and our own and other people's expectations. When we try to see the continuity of life, what experiences we had yesterday or the day before, and what we might re-experience tomorrow, we develop a fatalistic attitude towards life.

Fate and faith. If we are followers of fate then we can experience some difficult moments, which are limiting and restrictive. Then our self-motivation and self-drive become limited. However, looking at each day as a new beginning develops the aspect of faith. With faith, self-motivation and drive increase.

Another big question arises here: what to have faith in? Faith requires trust, trust requires conviction, and conviction requires personal experience. Personal experience requires determination and will, and will again requires faith.

You have said that it is best to let samskaras be released spontaneously. What do we do if a chronic debilitating physical symptom is getting us down and we wish to remove it?

It is very hard to judge whether a physical debility is the result of a samskara or of some kind of pranic disturbance. We have to discriminate as to whether the pranas are disturbed and are affecting us in the form of an illness and pain in certain parts of the body, or whether it has something to do with a samskara. We can do this by looking at the symptom which is most prominent. Try to deal with the symptom first and this will rectify the problem.

What is the purpose of mouna in the ashram? I thought God gave us tongues to speak with. I talk quite a lot, so how can I attain mouna within?

The word 'mouna' is derived from the Sanskrit root *mun* which means to measure. The system of mouna as propagated in yoga and other spiritual traditions is not to stop talking but to have control over the expressions of the senses. The purpose of mouna is to measure the input and output of the senses as a way to obtain inner silence. This measuring is on the level of prana.

Prana is the natural life-giving force which is responsible for our survival in the manifest dimension. When we speak, think or act, prana is being used, and wastage of prana through uncontrolled and unchannelled activities is not acceptable in yoga. Unnecessary use of prana quickens the process of pranic discharge, which ultimately leads to early departure from the body. You will be expelled from life membership of this earth prematurely.

One example to illustrate this point is the practice of pranayama in which we are taught to breathe in a specific

way, making the breath slow, deep and long. Animals that breathe slowly and use their pranas through the breath in a controlled way tend to have a longer lifespan than animals that breathe fast. If you compare the lifespan of an elephant with that of a dog there is a great difference. If you compare the way a snake breathes with the way a rat breathes, relatively there is also a big difference in the natural life span. That is an external manifestation or experience of prana in relation to the breath.

Similarly, prana is monitored through speech or thought. The whole spectrum of yogic techniques: pratyahara, dhyana, pranayama or any other discipline, all aim at achieving inner silence in which there is perfect balance. This will only happen if there is awareness of the measurement. If you put too much sugar in tea, you cannot drink it. If you add too much tea you cannot drink it. Everything has to be in the right proportion.

As a way to preserve the energy of the body and to increase the potential of life, mouna is advocated in yogic traditions. Everybody wants to speak, whether that speech is creative, constructive or merely gossip. The sense organs and sense experiences, including speech and vision, govern most of our external life experience. Therefore, control of speech is necessary. It will come slowly, but you will definitely derive great benefit from the practice of mouna.

Can you tell us some details about spirits which inhabit trees? Were they once human? Do minerals and plants have consciousness?

The spirits which inhabit trees are neither good nor bad. Only devas, ghosts or souls in the form of spirits live in trees. Human beings who have evolved normally will not live in trees. They go to some other dimension from where, according to the nature of their karmas, they are redistributed. This occurs according to divine law which is beyond human comprehension.

According to yogic and tantric perception, these spirits are of three types: sattwic, rajasic, and tamasic. Different

types of beings fall into these three categories. People who commit suicide and the spirits of those who die under violent circumstances become the tamasic spirits. In common language they are known as ghosts and you can find them anywhere.

Rajasic spirits have had a normal death, but have not evolved spiritually. They still have a lot of ambition and desire left over and have again to take some kind of birth. They have to come back again in one way or another. These rajasic spirits are those in whom evolution continues its normal course.

The souls of enlightened beings or yogis do not fall into any of the three categories or gunas because they have transcended the different kinds of experience and have merged their individual identity with the cosmic identity. They are beyond tamas, rajas and sattwa.

The sattwic category is the most interesting one. It is the natural evolution of consciousness from the level of mineral to the state of human consciousness. Minerals have consciousness which can be awakened through our consciousness; provided we have intensity and one-pointedness we can fuse our mind with the mineral mind.

Faith also helps to awaken this energy. For example, if we make a statue out of ordinary rock and begin to worship it, we can transmit our consciousness into the stone, whether it is in the shape of Krishna, Shiva or Christ. When this merger takes place the consciousness within the stone comes alive. It then heeds our requests and demands if we pray for something, just as when people pray sincerely to Hanuman or the Virgin Mary to make something happen and it does happen. There is no real logical explanation. You have to understand the process of effusing your mind with the mineral mind.

Another state of experience or level of consciousness is in plant life. Plants can respond to love and affection, anger and threat. You can play nice music, such as Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto, or heavy metal to plants and observe

their sensitivity and response through the use of electrodes, because they are alive and receptive.

After plants comes the level of consciousness of animals. Fish, birds and all land animals, whether wild or domesticated, respond, recognize and communicate in their own way. They represent the growth of consciousness between plant experience and human experience. Just as humans die and their souls become either tamasic or rajasic, when a tree, stone or animal dies, its consciousness also evolves.

The evolution from zero matter to animate matter takes place in the sattwic spirit level. They are known as devas: the devas of stone deities, the devas of plants, etc. Each plant, tree and shrub and every type of grass has a deva or consciousness which belongs to that particular dimension. *Deva* means effulgent one. One percent consciousness is as active as consciousness which is one hundred percent aware. Therefore, from one to one hundred there may be ninety-nine transformations which are the ninety-nine devas. At every level you will find a deva or spirit inhabiting a particular life form.

We have been told to practise laughing before going to bed and on waking up, but I find it is not spontaneous even if I try. Laughter in general is the instinctive behaviour of an individual as a part of a group. On the other hand, almost every master insists his disciples laugh at these times. Is there any clue to solve this riddle and to make the laughing spontaneous on both occasions?

It has something to do with thoughts. One of the biggest conditionings of our life is the thinking process which constantly revolves around likes, wants and desires.

When you go to bed at night, not in the ashram, but in a house, there is a wife or husband beside you, along with many other things such as thoughts and insecurities about what tomorrow will bring, thoughts of finance, and so forth. Each and every mental situation that we encounter in life is restricted to our own pattern of personality and mentality.

Laughing is a spontaneous way to break the limiting patterns of the mind. When you laugh at night you do not have to look for a joke book or for something to tickle your nerves to make you laugh. Just look at the limitations of your own thoughts and mind and laugh at that. Look at the restrictive qualities which you are experiencing every moment and think how stupid, what an idiot you are and you will definitely laugh. That laughter will be the most natural, spontaneous and uplifting, and better than any joke book.

There is a reason behind everything, but reasons have to be understood in the proper frame of mind. When the right frame of mind is not there, we say it is our right not to reason why, which is an excuse that we give ourselves. Reasoning has to be done with an open and constructive mind in order to understand the secrets and the process that lies behind each and every expression of life. There is no better way than laughing.

The moment you laugh you overcome the natural barriers created by preconditioning and samskaras. Whether it is a momentary laugh and a momentary advancement and lowering of barriers, or permanent laughter and permanent lowering of barriers, it does not matter, one has to begin. The easiest way for me to laugh is to think of you people trying to think of something to laugh about, as I move my mind from room to room every morning and night!

Can you talk a little about the Baba Baidyanath temple, the Nath Akhara and the Devi temple in Deoghar?

The Baba Baidyanath temple has a mythological story associated with it. It is said that Ravana, the enemy of Rama who died by his hand, was a great worshipper of Lord Shiva. One day he was returning from the abode of Shiva with a Shivalingam in his hands. Shiva had told him very clearly that on his return journey he should not put the Shivalingam down anywhere, because once he set it down he would not be able to move it again. To cut a long story short, when Ravana came to the spot where Baidyanath temple now stands he

had an intense urge to practise amaroli and was desperately practising vajroli and all kinds of mudras and bandhas. He saw a boy grazing his cattle and told him to hold the lingam in his hand while he went to relieve himself, telling the boy not to put it down. The boy agreed. Ravana gave him the lingam and off he went. However, Ravana took a little time and, finding the lingam too heavy, the boy put it down on the ground. Just as Shiva had predicted, when Ravana came back and tried to lift it up, he could not do so, so he hammered it into the ground.

Some time ago, the government of India and Bihar tried to discover the depth of this Shivalingam stone. However, even with the use of different instruments, including X-rays, they were unable to locate the bottom of the cylindrical shaped stone. They do not know how deep it penetrates into the earth.

One day a man named Bhaju from the local tribe came to that particular spot and found the Shivalingam sticking out of the ground. In the purity of his simplicity and devotion he began to worship it. Lord Shiva, pleased with the man, appeared before him and said, "What do you want? Ask and it shall be given." Bhaju replied "I want you to stay here in the form of a healer."

There have been many instances where people have gone to the temple and have made a religious vow, for example, if they are cured they will perform this act or that penance, and so forth. They have then had dreams in which whatever they desired was fulfilled and they began to change both externally and psychically.

There is a documented story about a British officer who was living in that region during the time of the British Raj. He had to go to the front during the First World War. His wife came to the temple and prayed that he be saved. When the officer returned from the war he told his wife about a very strange experience of his. He had been wounded and was lying on the battlefield, surrounded by enemy soldiers who were bayoneting those still alive. The last image he could

remember was of a crazy guy with matted locks and a trident in his hand standing guard over him. He did not allow any of the enemy soldiers to come near him. Then his wife told him about her worship at the Shiva temple. Out of gratitude he built the present temple around the Shivalingam. It is considered to be an awakened Shiva temple where one's innermost desire is fulfilled.

In front of that Shiva temple is the Shakti mandir. It is smaller and is said to be one of the sixty-four *Shaktipithas* or places of Shakti in India. Each Shaktipitha has a particular organ of the body associated with it. The one in Deoghar represents the heart of Shakti. It is a very important centre in the tantric tradition. Red ribbons are tied linking the Shiva temple to the Shakti temple. This represents the link between Shiva and Shakti. They are eternally linked in a similar way to the marriage knot.

On the road, a short distance away from this temple, is a hut which looks just like a beggar's dwelling. It is known as the Nath Akhara, the first hatha yoga sect. This lineage began with Matsyendranath. Then came Gorakhnath and the eighty-six hatha yoga siddhas. That was their place. It was also the place in which Vamakhepa, one of the greatest tantrics of India, perfected his sadhana. He could be given the title of a 'living Shiva' because he was so elevated. He had received instructions as to what kind of sadhana to do and where and how he had to do it. Following those instructions he became one of the greatest living siddhas in the lineage of siddhas. He was a contemporary of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

The Devi temple on the edge of the cremation ground actually owns that land. No one goes there, not even during daylight, because the devi who resides there is alive and she manifests in different forms: a body, a girl, an animal, such as a cow or a dog, and she actually speaks aloud.

A few years ago, a sadhu was staying there doing his sadhana and the devi came and told him that if he did not desist from trying to acquire that siddhi he would die within

forty-one days. The sadhu thought it was just a trick of his imagination and continued with the practice. He died at the exact time the devi had predicted.

I went there once about two years ago when the guru of that place was still alive. He called me one night for a tantric sadhana that he was doing in the temple. I went there with another sannyasin and we saw the whole thing. The temple was filled with a pinkish type of glow. It was not coming from the lights, incense, smoke or fire. It was just a throbbing light. I could actually feel it with my hands. It is a really powerful place which I am very attracted to.

Could you tell us why the colour yellow is worn by jignasu aspirants?

Yellow is gold without brightness. It is the traditional colour worn by aspirants of sannyasa and of spiritual life. The colour prior to this is white. I do not think the people who laid down the code of dress for spiritual aspirants actually considered the vibrational aspect of the different colours. The choice was more in keeping with the moral and spiritual ideals they supported.

The vedic tradition, which is based on *karma*, action; *jnana*, wisdom; and *upasana*, worship or acknowledgement of a higher reality, accepted white, yellow and orange to denote the level of spiritual advancement. White represents purity. The novice, whether householder, brahmachari, student or one involved in society and worldly life, wore white in order to represent sincerity and earnestness of desire to know the spiritual truths.

Yellow represents a step higher than white where the aspirant is established in the spiritual path. The glow of the colour represents the dawn or Usha, the goddess of knowledge and intuition. It symbolizes the first opening of the eye of intuition.

Next comes geru, representing the fire by which the aspirant burns off, or is in the process of transcending, the manifest nature of personality, prakriti of the gross

dimension, and merging the awareness with the Divine. When you throw anything into fire it burns, becoming light and ash. In the same way, once the aspirant is established in the spiritual path or the path of sannyasa his total physical, mental, psychic and spiritual personalities merge into one. The geru colour is thus symbolic of illumination. This is the vedic concept.

The tantric concept is similar. They use two colours, mainly red, symbolizing the novice state, and black symbolizing the stage of the advanced practitioner. Red represents the rajasic qualities of the aspirant which is the motivating force behind the drive of the aspirant to realize his psychic potential; the urge to know.

Tantrics have always understood that no process begins with the state of sattwa. This is true, because the nature of sattwa is a continuous stream of light. The sattwic experience is one of being there, being the experience. Rajas, however, is seeking by nature, and red is considered to be the colour of activity, dynamism and motion. It is also the symbol and colour of Shakti, the dynamic principle of the manifest universe. It is the experience of the vitality and fluidity of Shakti.

Black represents the merging of all the perceptions into the state of *shoonyata* or *laya* in which they dissolve into one item and cease to be separate ingredients. The quality of the three gunas again dissolves back into seed form. There is implosion rather than explosion. That is the concept of *avyakta Prakriti* or unmanifest nature.

Black is the colour worn in alakhbara, where through the process of sadhana an effort is made by the sadhaka to expand consciousness and liberate energy, which is the meaning of the word tantra. A tantric is one whose sadhana is austerity or *tapasya*, intensive purification, and who is able to transcend the gross physical nature, losing all concept of name, form and idea. He then experiences the unity of consciousness.

Different traditions adopt different colours to mark the various levels of achievement in the spiritual journey.

Some are beginners, some are intermediate practitioners and some are advanced practitioners. In the vedic tradition the colours are white, yellow and geru, while in the tantric tradition they are red in the case of a sadhaka and black in the case of a siddha.

How does the generation of prana affect the koshas?

This is known as spontaneous body movement. Many times when you are doing something your body begins to do something else. The *vijnanamaya kosha*, the intuitive physical awareness, takes over and when that occurs you cannot stop yourself; voluntary control is lost. It is not annamaya control, it is vijnanamaya control of the body. At that time, you can go through a series of spontaneous asanas, you can also go through a series of spontaneous locks or bandhas. You can be lying down in shavasana and suddenly you are practising uddiyana bandha or agnisara kriya.

The process can be very smooth. It can also be dramatic when there is a lack of preparation on other levels. When that surge of energy comes into the physical body, dramatic movements occur. This happens because our blocks have not yet been cleared, our body has not yet come to a refined and balanced state; we are still working at it. However, momentarily there is a link. When we move into a different space the link is again created; it is not created in normal states. Therefore, there has to be preparation of the body.

This is one reason why Sri Swamiji has stuck with the practices of pawanmuktasana. That is the favourite group of asana of the Bihar School of Yoga. You will also notice that out of everybody who has come into the BSY system of teaching and has done pawanmuktasana, very rarely does anyone have such spontaneous body movements.

Those who are into hard exercises express these spontaneous body movements more often, because there is no nervous control. They are more concerned with practising the headstand or the peacock pose. Pawanmuktasana, although it is very simple, has more far-reaching effects

on our body. The practice of yoga nidra also helps in this context.

Please tell us something about memory in relation to karma and samskara?

It depends on what you mean by memory. There is memory of events and there is also a reaction in the tissue when something occurs, and even if we are not totally aware of it, our body picks up that event and chemical changes take place. Feelings and emotions arise, and chemicals are produced which create a certain state of mind. In a sense these are all memories.

Whether you can actually relate this reaction with the event which caused it, is a different thing. It was also taking place in all the other tissues, in the brain and so on. The brain is a coordinating, focusing area, where things come together. With enough refinement, you can bring a lot of these old states, these deep instinctive feelings which have no real conscious component, into consciousness, and perhaps, if you are very intuitive, you can then make the connections and understand the underlying karma.

Is it more important to establish the link with the psychic sound than worry about the psychic symbol? I have trouble following the psychic symbol. Should I just concentrate on the sound first and then let the symbol come up by itself?

There are three things which you have to consider at the time of mantra repetition. The first is the psychic sound, which is the sound of mantra. When you repeat a mantra, it should not take the form of mental chattering, but there should be full awareness of the sound that you are creating mentally. Even if you say *Om* mentally, you are creating a sound vibration, a sound frequency in your mind. It is that psychic sound awareness which is of prime importance.

The second thing is the psychic breath, which is not inhalation or exhalation. The psychic breath is the length of the mantra which should be equal and continuous. Some

people have a short mantra like *Om*. Now, do you say *Om*, or *Om, Om, Om, Om, Om* in one breath, or *Oooooommmmm*? Some people have longer mantras, like *Om Namah Shivaya* or *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*. Each mantra is different in length, and maintaining that length according to your pattern of mind and speed of chanting is known as psychic breath awareness.

In order to increase this awareness, we often instruct practitioners to combine the mantra with the breath. Either *Om* while inhaling and *Namah Shivaya* while exhaling, or *Om Namah Shivaya* during inhalation and *Om Namah Shivaya* during exhalation, and so on. It changes according to different individuals. It is not the same for everybody, but once you get used to that particular length of mantra, it has to be maintained.

The third item is the psychic symbol which should be kept with you, but not used until you are firmly established in mantra awareness and length of breath awareness. When this is all happening simultaneously without any effort, then finally you can bring in the psychic symbol. You may have to struggle with it for some time before the symbol fixes itself.

These three things have to be considered: sound, breath and symbol, and you should go step by step.

Could you speak about friendship and spiritual life?

Let us begin with friendship. What is your definition of friendship? First clarify that, because the definition of friendship as I know it is probably the same as yours. "A friend in need is a friend indeed!" If this definition holds true then a sannyasin or a spiritual aspirant is a friend to everyone. He is one who can share the good things of life with everyone, who can share the love, the affection, the frustrations, and provide the right guidance at the right time. He strives to uplift the nature of others at all times without falling into a state of anxiety and depression himself, and without allowing the other person to fall into such states. This is the definition of friendship according to ashram and to common sense.

If you believe or agree with this definition then who is stopping you from being friends with anybody? Rather, the whole process of spiritual life is to be open and friendly with all fellow beings. To help, to guide, to love, to live in harmony with and to cherish each other and each other's qualities is the aim of spiritual life.

Unfortunately, when we think of friendship there is a selfish desire or attitude involved. That is the aspect which has to be controlled according to the rules of sannyasa. Remove the aspect of selfishness from life in order to experience true friendship, which is not defined as speaking good words to each other. That is the external behaviour only. Friendship is not generated in the mind, it is generated from within the heart. Friendship is not a language of the mind, it is a language of the heart and you have to understand the language of the heart rather than trying to think in terms of mind language.

Friendship is not only smiles. I may smile at you externally, but totally dislike you internally. Would that be called friendship? No. However, we may have conflicting times together, at the same time as being linked in some other dimension beyond thought. We support each other and help each other grow. I would call that friendship. Therefore, do not try to confuse friendship with the normal states of mental experiences or preconditioned ideas.

The *Yoga Sutras* have stated very clearly, "Be friends with those people who express friendship. Have compassion for those who are in pain. Be happy and joyful when you are in the company of the virtuous, and ignore the unvirtuous because from them you will receive nothing."

This is the rule for people in general. As you evolve further in your own life and gain spiritual understanding, then you also have the ability to convert the negativity of another person into a positive frame of mind, but the basic rule stays the same. This describes the process of openness, friendship, joyfulness and compassion. If you can apply this in your life, I am sure you will go very far.

I have been aware of the desire to be open and compassionate towards others, but sometimes it is just not spontaneous. How can one develop that feeling?

Give yourself time. You might have the desire to be open, but you are not giving yourself time for those things to manifest naturally and for you to reach that state of openness. What you are experiencing are momentary flashes of this state. In the course of your sadhana, meditation, japa and other practices, as the mental tension reduces, and this cannot be a conscious process, the barriers are lowered from the unconscious. At this stage these qualities will manifest naturally, so give yourself time.

With so many destructive influences in the world today, how can we preserve the remaining natural resources? What action can we take in order to create a harmonious environment for ourselves and for future generations?

The need to preserve the remaining resources and promote a sustainable society for future generations is an issue of the greatest concern in India today. However, in order to effectively redress the environmental crisis which has arisen recently in the country, we must first look back at the spiritual principles and foundation upon which this country and, in fact, all the ancient civilizations of the world were based.

It was said by the ancient sages and seers that in the beginning of human civilization, thousands of years ago, all over the world there was one culture. That culture was based on spiritual values. The early humans who populated this earth were not just primitive hunters and nomadic herdsman. They were a highly spiritual and ethical people, living in organized villages, towns and cities, under kings who were guided by sages and seers.

In India itself two very great civilizations existed in the twilight period of prehistory, about which very little is known by the modern India today. The tantric culture which flourished thousands of years ago, even before the vedic culture, is said to be the oldest spiritual culture of the world.

Although its origins may have been somewhere on the Indian subcontinent, this was a universal culture which in early times was found in all parts of the world. Both the tantric and the vedic cultures were based not on material advancement, but on truth and harmony with the internal and external worlds.

Within these early cultures, man's entire life from birth to death was considered to be an outer enactment of the Divine. The five elements which comprised the universe and everything within it were viewed as sacred: the sun, the wind, the earth, the mountains, the trees and the plants, the lakes, rivers and seas. Everything in nature was divine and worthy of man's worship and reverence. This respect for the natural elements was further cultivated by daily and periodic rituals and sacrifices which brought man into a closer attunement and association with the subtler aspects of nature manifesting within and without.

In those times the earth gave forth great bounty, but the people never thought that this wealth should be hoarded by them or used indulgently. They accepted what nature provided and used it according to their needs. All the excess, whatever was not required for their immediate use, was kept aside to be offered in sacrifices and rituals back to the divine source. These external forms of worship produced a change in the external environment and altered the state of perception of the individual. They created a kind of renewable atmosphere, a divinely inspired and purified environment in which the people lived a life of harmony and close association with all the elements of nature.

These early cultures fostered a more universal and holistic approach to life. Man never considered himself to be a separate individual. His life was an integral part of the family, the community, the tribe, nature, and the cosmos. However, as time passed, economic and intellectual development led to diversification within human nature. This holistic approach to life gave way as man's individualistic tendencies arose. The material cultures gradually became predominant and the spiritual cultures degenerated as man

became more selfish, greedy and cunning. This was the beginning of man's alienation from himself, the society and the cosmos.

The material culture which arose in conflict with the spiritual culture was responsible for political corruption, exploitation, conflict, cruelty, wars and famines. This led to disturbance of the natural forces, producing disharmony and imbalance in the environment. This was the initial conflict which we can read about in all the ancient books, between the divine and the demonic forces. Such conflicts actually existed, and ultimately they became an environmental issue as the spiritual cultures were gradually suppressed and overpowered by the material cultures.

With the decline of the spiritual cultures, the sustainable use and development of natural resources, which was an integral part of these traditions, was gradually forgotten, along with the daily ritual offerings and sacrifices to the elements and divinities of nature. The material culture proceeded to plunder and corrupt without any consideration for the ecological balance, or of any spiritual or even human values. This has led us to the present situation in which man's attitude towards nature and towards life itself has become so demonic that it seems as if nothing of nature, of beauty, of divinity will survive the onslaught of this greed.

If we are to correct this situation, it is not only the external environment that we must consider. The environmental crisis which we are now facing externally is a product of our materialistic and decadent culture, our values, our way of thinking and living. In order to create a renewable and sustainable environment, we will first have to change our way of thinking and living, our materialistic culture and our values. There must be a shift from the material back to the spiritual. In order to do this, serious investigation must be made of the ancient systems and cultures in which we may find some guidelines by which we can begin to create a better future and a better world for ourselves and for the future generations.

The science of yoga is foremost of the ancient systems which have come to light in modern times in order to restore man's balance and integrity. Through yoga, all the aspects of man's personality, of his outer and inner life, can be purified, harmonized and regulated. Once this has been achieved with even a small group of people, the effects of internal harmony will automatically be transmitted to the external environment. Yoga aims not only towards sustainable growth, but towards a universal harmony and development which is holistic.

The concept of sustainable development and growth is still materialistic and lacking in spiritual insight. If your mother is adorned in an exquisite garment and decorated with costly ornaments of silver, gold and precious gems, will you take pride in gradually disrobing her and selling off her ornaments one at a time so that you and your children can enjoy all the comforts and luxuries of life? You know very well that the mother's wealth is still being exploited and that it cannot last in this way indefinitely, but at least it should last long enough to provide you, and hopefully your children, with a fairly optimistic future. This approach towards the environmental issue may be a starting point, but ultimately we will have to go much further towards meeting environmental needs.

Perhaps we will have once again to reconstruct the concepts and the symbolic representations of the elemental deities as they were revered and respected by mankind throughout the world in ancient times, during the tantric and vedic ages. This is already happening in such cults which revere the Mother in all forms of nature that are arising in different parts of the world today. However, these kinds of cults, in themselves, will not be sufficient to bring about a total change in man's nature, which is what is needed. To bring about lasting environmental harmony, our entire culture needs to be restructured along more spiritual, yogic lines. Otherwise, we are just fooling ourselves in thinking that we are trying to do some good for the environment, for our children and for the future generations.

Our motivation is still thoughtless and selfish. We fail to see nature for what it is, for the divinity which it represents in this world. We still want to give it our order; we still want to make it bow and bend to meet our demand and need, even if it be sustainable and maintainable. We are trying to make a servant out of the Divine, and in doing this we have lost our spiritual heritage and everything that was worth living for in this life.

Ultimately, sustainable environmental measures will also fail and the quality of human life will continue to degenerate until we wake up to these realities and begin to change the order of our life, of our society and of the world from the inside out. What is needed is not just environmental regeneration, but a regeneration of human values and a more universal approach to life. For this reason, Sri Swamiji taught that, “Yoga is the need of today and the culture of tomorrow.” He was never negative about the world’s future. He said, “I do not believe in doomsday prophecies. Each cloud has a silver lining. We have to look on the bright side of life and develop the highest qualities in ourselves and in others.”

This kind of attitude is a necessity. It is only by maintaining a positive view and by harmonizing and correcting our own internal environment that we will be able to bring about any truly constructive changes in the outer world. Everything else is just wishful thinking and idle talk. The first step towards environmental conservation is the regulation, conservation and regeneration of our own internal environment. When we are able to integrate the principles of yoga into our own lifestyle, when we are able to rebalance and restructure our own personality, when we are able to control and take responsibility for our own state of physical and mental health, then we will be in a better position to see what is needed in the outside world, and how we should go about making a truly sustainable society.

What happens to the soul after death?

First of all, the soul is considered to be something which does not die. In fact, it is the essence of the life force. This life

force is experienced on different levels, as different things. When this life force is confined to a body which is made up of the five elements, then it is perceived as an individual, having a set pattern of mind, karma, and lifestyle.

When the life force leaves the body it is known as physical death. However, the process of death does not stop here; it is a very lengthy process. The life force leaves the gross body, but it has not yet left the subtle structure, or the greater mind. It is here that most of the experiences of spirits and other subtle life forms take place. According to belief, this life force does not leave the subtle body for a period of twenty-one days. For twenty-one days the subtle life, the soul, remains near the environment which it has known, whether it is in the house or near the family or near somebody with whom there was great affinity or affection.

At this level, it is possible to get in touch with the departed soul. What we think, the emotions that we express, the attachments that we experience, are all like little strings that further attract the spirit to our dimension. The spirit seeks freedom from bondage, from the worldly ties that we create out of our thinking, our grief, emotions and attachments. As long as we are subject to such intense feelings, the spirit is again pulled down to this earthly plane, and is not permitted to go beyond this dimension. However, after twenty-one days, an automatic disassociation with the earthly plane takes place, and the spirit leaves the mental body, which is comprised of emotions, desires, attractions, attachments and so forth.

Different traditions also believe that if there was an inherent, strong desire in the life of the person who died and that desire was not fulfilled, then within twenty-one days, there is bound to be another birth of that spirit. This kind of theory is quite strong in the Buddhist traditions, in which they believe very strongly in reincarnation. In such traditions which say that within twenty-one days there is going to be birth again, people have been given signs, dreams or visions of the actual location where the spirit is going to take rebirth,

glimpses of the environment, the type of family and other details about the birth.

After twenty-one days the spirit enters into the third dimension, which is the astral dimension. In this dimension there is greater flexibility to move in different directions. One can go on an onward journey, or remain as a spirit, a guiding energy or force. Someone who has suffered in life, and who is in a very destructive and agitated state, will remain in the form of a ghost. These are people who are not yet liberated, who have not yet crossed the final astral barrier and who remain confined in it. After crossing the astral barrier, which happens as a natural course of evolution, again after twenty-one days, they merge with the universal spirit.

That is the theory and it has given birth to many different ideas about dying and death. It has been said that when death comes naturally and you are aware of it, you know that you are dying and that you are taking the last breaths of life, then at that moment you detach your awareness from the things that keep you confined to the earthly plane. Think of God, or identify with some kind of universal or divine concept at this moment and do not think of the unfulfilled desires or karmas. This is just one process, in order to quicken the movement from one dimension to the next. By thinking in the last moments of something which is not personal, not individualistic, but of God, and having that kind of awareness and consciousness, it is possible to transcend the barrier and bondage of desires and karmas.

The last moment of death is considered to be the most vital, but there also has to be acceptance of death and no fear. In many prevailing traditions, in order to divert the attention from worldly affairs at the time of death, and in some homes even today, people hold week-long sessions of mantra chanting or scriptural reading or positive thinking, in order to facilitate this evolution of spirit.

Apart from this, on an individual level, there is a ritual that is known as *shraaddha*. This refers to the showing of our gratitude to the departed person, in order to help that spirit

overcome the attachments of family and desire. For twelve days after death, a very strict discipline is followed in the home. First, on the same day as death occurs there is shaving of the head, so that the spirit does not recognize the persons with whom it has been associated on the physical plane. Secondly, for about twelve days, there is a strict routine to be followed in the home: meals at certain times, sleeping at certain times, and not going into the room where the person has died. There is not a loud, outward expression of grief. You can be sad and cry and go through all the emotions of mourning, but not in the same room where the death took place, because at that time, the body attachment is very strong. The unlinking of body with soul is a major event.

After this, there is also *tarpana*, or the offering of honey, rice and sesame seeds. These three things are offered to the departed soul and thrown into the water of a flowing river. Honey represents the love and affection offered to help inspire the soul on its onward journey. Rice signifies the acknowledgement of our gratitude to our father and mother for giving us our body. Sesame seeds represent the teachings, education and samskaras which we imbibed from them in seed form. It is like saying, "Thank you for giving us these things, now we are returning them to you."

It is a process of gratitude, and this process avoids any kind of emotional link which may exist between the soul and us. This kind of acknowledgement is received by the spirit as recognition of its contribution to your growth and your life. When the spirit sees that the offering has been made in recognition of the effort, the hard work it has made during life, then it is satisfied. It is like the fulfilling of a destiny, a karma.

Generally, a form of havan or meditation is also performed. Havan or fire ceremony is performed in order to infuse light into the spirit. Physically, we say 'dust to dust'. Similarly, astrally and spiritually we say 'light to light'. It is like saying, "We are offering you light so that you become light, and become liberated."

These are the things which are done on the physical level in order to allow the spirit to evolve. It is here that the individual effort ends. Once this process is complete, the spirit leaves the astral dimension and enters into the atmic, universal, cosmic plane where it knows no sorrow, no pain, nothing, just peace and eternal life.

In meditation, the same thing is also done. The thoughts and desires of people are like lassos which are thrown around the neck of the spirit. In meditation, when the image of the departed person is merged with fire, then even the mental and emotional attachment is removed. Of course, we continue to feel the same emotions towards the departed person; this occurs on a different level, on the level of the spirit which does not experience things in the same way as we do.

In the short form, this process of helping the departed soul takes thirteen days and in the long form it takes one year and twenty-one days. Nowadays people only do the short version.

What is the purpose of asanas in relation to the release of tensions and awareness?

First of all, every single tissue has memory and intelligence. However, many of the healing systems that have developed have focused on muscle. It is not that muscle is more intelligent than bones and nerves, they are all the same. Muscle is an expressive organ and it is easy to see what is going on because it is expanding and contracting. It is part of the pingala nadi system. We have big muscles and small muscles, long muscles and flat muscles, all of which are moving and obvious. Muscle is a good place to start, and it is external.

Muscle forms a protective armour and it reflects what is going on in all the other systems of the body, because of its communication through fluid, and that is exactly what we are trying to do: to get information through asana by unlocking this information.

What happens is that we cut the consciousness from the body. We create unconscious parts in our body, because we hold tension and cannot relax. This requires a slow, gradual process of re-establishing integration at all different levels.

Asanas are gross ways of integrating the whole body. Mudras are one of the most refined ways to do this. Asana, pranayama, hatha yoga or shatkarma, are all designed to put some kind of pressure on energetic systems, thereby bringing them into our conscious awareness. On a gross level, if you hit your arm, you will start to feel the muscle. You can also stretch your arm; this is a nicer way of doing it. You can even do other more refined postural manoeuvres, attitudinal manoeuvres, which put organs into different relationships and create different energy systems. However, first of all, you have to unblock and clean out the body.

Please talk about the role sannyasins have played in politics, economics and war.

There have been many different traditions. In Egypt there was always a high priest guiding the affairs of state. In India there were gurus guiding these affairs and in Tibet, the Lamas. That was around the time of Christ. There was always a guru figure in parliament and at court, who could veto the instructions of the king and any decision that was adverse to the growth of society. In India these traditions continued right up to the arrival of the Mughals.

The stories that we hear in India are of sadhus and swamis who led their own ashrams and lived very secluded lives. During parliament and court sessions, they would go to the city and advise on any new laws or methods of defence and agriculture. These rishis, as they were known, held the highest position in society. Apart from that, they were also scientists. Sage Yajnavalkya was the first rishi in history to actually propagate an agrarian society with rules on farming and the marketing of produce. The whole system was envisioned by him.

Many of these sages knew about different herbs. Charaka was a medical expert. Even medical students in western countries today study parts of Charaka Samhita. There were many sannyasins, sadhus and rishis who were inventors of armaments for defence, different kinds of missiles and ways of launching them. Their role in social development, economic growth, defence, law and spirituality was considerable.

The concept I grew up with was of a spiritual or holy man being a man of peace and gentleness, not of one fighting and creating weapons.

Peace is of course what spiritual men aspire for. You may wish to have peace in your home and to convey the message of peace to other homes, but if some nitwit starts throwing stones at your house, breaking the doors and windows, and lighting fires everywhere, your gospel of peace will not help the situation. The power of defence was considered necessary for the propagation of harmonious behaviour and social attitudes.

The weapons invented by the sages were not actually used for attack. There were very strict rules that if nations were fighting, they would use only conventional weapons. The generals of each opposing army had to decide on the rules of warfare before the start of war, which arms were going to be used and how they were going to fight.

The account of war given in the *Mahabharata* is very systematic. There were definite rules and guidelines of warfare. Foot soldiers could only fight with foot soldiers; the cavalry could only fight with the cavalry; armoured vehicles could only attack other armoured vehicles. Seeking your equal to pick a fight with was the applied attitude. The fighting had to stop at sunset and at that time everybody became friends.

There was no enmity or animosity on either side. They could go to the enemy camp, have dinner there and then return to their own camp. One soldier was not the enemy of

another soldier as he was just doing his duty; of course, there was a difference of opinion on other levels. Even the heavy armoury, which can be compared with atomic warfare today, was only used twice in mythological history; once towards the end of the *Mahabharata* and once during the *Ramayana* war.

It is related in the *Mahabharata*, that when Krishna was commanding the opposing army, the Pandavas used to go every day for his blessings for the next day's fight. It was an incredible attitude: "I will fight with you during the day and in the evening we will discuss the day's fighting and what we are going to do tomorrow." Blessings were extended to the opponents: "May you be victorious." In those days the sentiment was "May you win", and not, "I shall win!" It was a different kind of positive mentality. That is the true concept of a *kshatriya* or warrior in the Indian system.

Somebody once said to me that the more you chase after things in spiritual life the more they run away from you; the more you avoid them, the more they chase you.

That is true. In spiritual life it is said that eventually you have to give up the desire to attain realization. If you wish to attain realization, then give up the desire to attain it. It is also said that what we chase after in spiritual life, the experiences, abilities or siddhis that we wish to have, run away from us when we go towards them with desire. This is because they are qualities which do not come under the jurisdiction of the mind and it is difficult for these qualities to be converted into an experience or language which is understood and accepted by the mind.

However, if you have no desire, then the mind automatically leaves its preconditioning and there is no expectation, just a practitioner and follower of a path. The mind transcends its own limitations in this stage of desirelessness. Those qualities which belong to a different dimension than the mind come automatically, as one has transcended the boundaries of the mind. If you chase them, you are chasing them with the mind and they run away from you. Chase them with desire and they also run away from you. If you do not

chase them nor do you care for them, they will be attracted towards you, because there is no craving; there is no karma of desire.

Tell us about the yogic view of astral travel.

Astral travel is a state of transference of consciousness, whether you leave your body here and go for a trip to China or you simply try to identify yourself with a tree. If you see a tree and fully identify yourself with it, losing your body awareness, that transfer of consciousness is known as astral projection because you have projected your mind out of your body into the tree. You are no longer aware of the surroundings. This is not an achievement; it is simply a symptom of having a degree of mastery over your mind.

A person who does not know how to drive a car will easily have an accident. Instead of pressing the brake he will press the accelerator, and this is quite a common occurrence. As we become more and more skilful, driving becomes quite spontaneous. You do not even have to think whether you have to press the clutch or accelerator.

In a similar way, the achievements in yoga are referred to as siddhis; however, once you have achieved them they no longer appear to be special powers, but simply natural states of being in which you have a greater amount of mastery over the mind.

Yoga nidra is a practice in which the faculty of astral projection can be increasingly developed. Relax the body, lose the feeling of body identity, transfer your mind and perceptions; that is one of the techniques, although we do not go into the practice in full depth because it is not possible for the teacher to go chasing you all over the world!

What is the difference between psychic symbol and ishta devata?

First comes mantra. It is a set of sounds which corresponds to the practitioner's vibrations and which awakens the psychic

centres or chakras by influencing them on the vibratory level. Each mantra, according to its vibration, creates a psychic symbol. The combination of sounds will make you gradually aware of the symbol, which is the visual aspect of the mantra.

If you do not have a psychic symbol, it will manifest spontaneously as you evolve in your mantra meditation. The image will become so strong and powerful that it will superimpose itself on top of every other visual image that you may think of or create during meditation. For example, it has been the experience of many people that while repeating and concentrating on the mantra, they have suddenly seen a technicoloured triangle manifesting before them. After that, they adopt the triangle as their psychic symbol or visual image of their mantra.

The *ishta devata* can mean different things to different people. Indians have always seen and experienced divinity in two ways. One is in the manifest form which is known as *sakara*, having a form; the other is unmanifest or *nirakara*, without form. The whole gamut of three hundred and thirty million gods and goddesses is nothing but *ishta devatas*.

A Shaivite or a Vaishnavite will always say that Lord Shiva, Lord Rama or Lord Krishna is his *ishta devata*. That is the image he worships. It is the concept of a manifest form of divinity representing a quality to which he is attracted. A person who has faith in Rama will be very happy with the image of Rama. The sensitivity or nature of that individual personality and mind are thus linked with the quality which is represented by the image. There is a rapport with it. The same thing applies to any of the gods or goddesses.

The meaning of *ishta devata* is not a god; it means effulgence, illumination or light. *Deva* is the root. The raw power which is experienced in the form of a twenty-five, forty or one thousand watt bulb is the *devata*. When the word 'ishta' is added, it means a quality which illuminates, an attribute of divinity which brings enlightenment according to one's nature and belief.

To those who are not attuned to this concept, devata will not have a physical image, but will convey an idea of a superior attribute or quality which is superhuman. For many people it becomes an abstract idea. For example, the mantra *Om Klim* has the psychic symbol of a red inverted triangle and its ishta devata is the force or shakti of time. Many people cannot work with a mere concept of time, but if they are given the ishta devata of Kali, then they can immediately relate to that image. Kali is the shakti of eternal time, time which consumes everything. However, ishta devata can be an abstract idea for those who are not exposed to the concept of devas and devatas, and everyone's devata will ultimately find a place in the myriad of Indian gods and goddesses.

I know of an Australian swami who practised his japa and meditation for seven or eight years, at which point he began to see visions of Christ in his dreams. That was his ishta devata appearing before him. However, his mind intervened and interpreted it as Christ telling him that yoga should not be practised and that he should join a Christian missionary service group; so he became a Born-Again Christian. Then all his experiences stopped because he gave up yoga and all his practices. The visions meant that his ishta devata was Christ and that he should try to imbibe those qualities which Christ represents.

What can be the inspiration to encourage us to continue the practices after leaving the structured ashram environment? What technique can one use to forget one's past patterns, all one has learnt, without suppression?

Apart from the intellectual concept of trying to forget or unlearn what we have learnt, and attempting to begin again, I feel that there are two qualities which need to be rediscovered in life. These qualities are like the two wings of a bird without which it is not possible to fly or escape from our lopsided conditioning. One quality is love and the other is faith. If we can incorporate these two qualities into our

lives, then no matter what kind of lopsided situations we may encounter, we can transcend them.

The nature of love should be unconditional, not conditioned like the feeling we generally carry with us. That is the real definition of love. The same thing applies to faith, which should not be based on any kind of rational concept or intellectual conditioning. It should be a spontaneous expression of our deeper nature.

Love and faith can be awakened on different levels. One is feeling them for a person; in our case it is the inspirer, the guru. They can also be felt towards a goal, a direction that we hold dear, or for a cause that we wish to attain. I feel these two things to be really necessary ingredients in order to maintain mental clarity. Once these two qualities are experienced, our inspiration will not die. Inspiration dies when there is analysis of that inspiration. Inspiration dies when there is some kind of desire or ambition attached to it, or when we are not able to come to terms with ourselves, or there is some incongruity between our inner desire and our actual effort.

It is my feeling that once we are able to have this faith and love, then the emptying of the mind will be a natural process and there will not be any kind of suppression, which is a state where you hold things back and bottle them up within yourself. Release is a state where nothing is held back and you are sincere to yourself. Rather than holding back your feelings, your aims, the nature of your faith, you have to release them. That should be seen externally in the actions you perform, in the thoughts you think, in the beliefs that you hold.

In my opinion, and I feel strongly about this, that is the only way to maintain a clear concept in life. Experiencing total unconditioned love and faith is similar to the experience of total freedom. That should be the aim of everyone.

If you feel strongly that you may lose yourself in your conditionings, then you should also feel strongly about

awakening these faculties in your present life and carry them through when you leave the ashram environment. That will be a support. What happens to separate individuals is a different matter; we all have to live our lives in different circumstances, situations and conditions and we must not forget that we are influenced by people, events and circumstances. Despite all these influences and distractions which constantly, come to us, our strength should always be love and faith. We can then go through life with greater ease.

Can you please comment on the different values of eastern and western cultures, and how they are expressed in people's behaviour, feelings and thinking patterns?

I have come across certain difficult situations in my life, when I was required to understand other people's emotional problems. Perhaps because I have been brought up with yoga and do not know any other way of life, or because of the samskaras which I have received from early childhood, I find great difficulty in communicating with people when they say, "Can you understand my problem? I am feeling so and so." I have to say, "No, I cannot understand your problem, because I have never been confronted with this kind of experience." And when people ask, "Can you understand the head-trip which I am going through?" I reply, "No, I cannot understand it because I have never gone through that kind of head-trip."

From these interactions with people, I have come to believe that they are so involved in their own mental processes that they have forgotten how to feel. In yoga or in the so-called eastern traditions, there is a lot of emphasis on feelings. You are taught not to act from the head, but from the heart. First feel and then act; do not think, act spontaneously. That is the difference between the eastern and the western cultures. The western culture teaches one to think first and then act. These two processes are poles apart. One is linear, logical and precise, and the other is subtle. Those people who are able to feel correctly will also excel in thinking.

About one year ago, I was reading an issue of *Time* magazine. It stated that in the computer and medical departments of universities, the majority of students are from Asia, Korea and India; there are very few Americans. This majority of people who had excelled in this field were from a culture which taught them how to feel rather than rationalize. This is reflected in the creativity which they express in different environments, in various ways.

What about the pronunciation of a mantra if we have different accents? At what speed should we repeat our mantra?

It is always better to make the pronunciation as close to Sanskrit as possible and not convert it into Queen's English or Australian English.

The speed has to be constant, not very fast and not very slow, but rhythmical, like the movement of the second hand of a clock: one, two, three, four, five. *Om . . . Om . . . Om . . .* If the mantra is longer, then take a longer time, but have the same gap between each of the mantras.

I have heard that if you start repeating your mantra fast and decrease the speed, something will decrease inside?

The only instruction given by yoga is that whatever the speed, your mind should be constantly aware and linked with the mantra. The link is important, not the speed. If you can flow with the mantra at a slow speed, it is all right. If you can flow with the mantra at a fast speed it is also all right, provided you are able to maintain that link between mantra and awareness. However, many people describe different methods of how to achieve this link from their own experience.

Is there a particular sequence involved with audible, whispering and mental repetition?

Audible, whispering or mental repetition depends on your own intensity of concentration. It is always better to repeat

the mantra mentally, but if you face a lot of distractions then say the mantra audibly: *Om Namah Shivaya . . . Om Namah Shivaya*.

Focus the mind on the sound vibration of the mantra, then stop this audible repetition and start whispering. Concentrate even more, then start mental repetition. The only thing you have to watch is your own mental state.

Often, while we are chanting a mantra mentally, we tend to sway with concentration or with introversion of mind. When the swaying of body and head begins then move from mental to whispering. If you still cannot control your sleep and swaying, then start verbally. The process changes according to your mental state.

Why do we have to use a mala when repeating our mantra?

The use of a mala is to break the monotony of concentration, so that you do not lose yourself but maintain one aspect of awareness active within you as the observer of what is happening; the drashta aspect.

Another rule associated with the mala is that you do not cross the *sumeru*, the top. It is another point of breaking concentration. The moment you reach it, you know you have come to the end, so you turn around and start again. Introversion of the mind is then stopped and it becomes extroverted. If you go in all at once, it is very difficult to handle the experience that can take place.

Is there any social benefit to be had by becoming a hermit and living in a forest?

In the life of a renunciate, as distinct from sannyasa, there are two stages. In the first stage, one should live and work in society in order to perfect the sadhana of the *indriyas*, the senses. Generally, this sadhana is taken to be spiritual, but it is not. Spiritual sadhana is the last thing. Prior to that, there is sadhana for the mind and the senses; these two are more important than spiritual sadhana.

Sadhana for the mind is learning to control the mind in different situations, when you are exposed to anger, frustration and conflicting situations and ultimately learning how to maintain mental equilibrium. You can use the yogic practices of pratyahara and dharana in order to recognize your mental states and perceptions, and to control your mental interaction with the environment and with others.

Before that, there is the sadhana of the senses. The *karmendriyas* and the *jnanendriyas* have likes and dislikes, opposite poles. Understanding the craving of the senses and changing them will take place, not by following the life of renunciation, but by living in society.

For this reason, the *purusharthas* have been defined. The four purusharthas are artha, kama, dharma and moksha. These four come within the range of the senses and the mind and from their interaction with one's own self and with others. Of course, there has to be *nishkama bhava*, a selfless attitude, in the sadhana. The aim of such a sadhana is to give better control over the mind, eliminate samskaras and reduce tamas.

Therefore, when we say we are practising spiritual sadhana, it is actually a misconception, because in our present state of perception, living, mentality and being, we cannot practise spiritual sadhana. Even if we practise jnana yoga, we first have to change our thought patterns and attitudes. If we practise bhakti yoga, first we need to focus on something. If we practise raja yoga, we need to have a basis for the yamas and niyamas, for asanas and pranayamas. Without that we cannot go beyond. Only when we know the mind can we enter into the spiritual aspect of sadhana.

In order to perfect the spiritual aspect, one has to leave the external environment and become a recluse or a hermit. Then sadhana is performed in seclusion and is of a different nature. I do not have that understanding, but it is coming slowly, as I observe Sri Swamiji and the direction in which he is going.

Once you become a hermit and renunciate, and live away from the social environment, whether it is in the jungle, the forest or any secluded place, then your mentality and lifestyle

have to change. The previous ideas and attachments that you might have had during your previous sadhana have to be dropped.

To come to this stage takes a long time. It is like saying, if you are injured then treat the injury first before expecting health. In the same way, in our lifetime we are injured by different weapons. Anger is a weapon. If we yell and shout at somebody there is injury. Negligence can create injury. Everything can create injury in life, if one is not careful. Therefore, it is important to realize the statement in the *Bhagavad Gita*, that a yogi performs actions with the aim of self-purification. These actions are performed the by mind, intellect and speech.

One has to balance all these aspects first, and those people who become adepts from the very first day can have very good experiences subject to their mental conditioning. You can have very good experiences, but they will be subject to your mental conditioning. For example, if an instruction is given to you to meditate on God, and only that instruction is given to you, what do you do? You begin to meditate on Shiva or Krishna or Rama or Jesus or Mohammed or anybody to have their vision; however, the instruction which you received was not to meditate on Rama or Krishna or Mohammed or Jesus, it was to meditate on God. From where did you bring that image? You used your mind. This is a common mistake which I am sure we all make.

At the time of sannyasa, swamis are given a sadhana. It is meditation on the mantra *Om*; but generally nobody listens to that instruction. You will find that every sannyasin will have a picture of their guru and will look at it and stare at it and do trataka on it and contemplate upon it, but that was not the instruction! This means that our mental antenna is not receptive enough to instructions. It is very hard to disassociate from our mental conditionings.

It is equally hard to find a person who follows instructions. Nobody follows instructions. Therefore, in the prior state of sadhana the emphasis on a sensorial and mental sadhana is

given, rather than on a spiritual sadhana. If we use the terms mental and sensorial sadhana, nobody is going to practise it. They will say, “We have come here for spiritual sadhana.”

Spirituality is not an easy thing and once you enter into the spiritual side of *sannyasa*; renunciation or *tyaga*, then the total personality becomes magnetic. There is identification with the spirit. Once this identification comes about, the environment changes. Just one tree of sandalwood is enough to permeate the air all around with its fragrance. In the same way, a real spiritual sadhaka, even if living in the remotest corner of the planet, will be able to spread his vibrations all around. People will be inspired and transformed by them. In that way, they can help change the social environment.

Nothing will happen if all of us decide to go on a retreat to a mountain and practise many hours of meditation. It will be self-deceiving, and deceiving others also. Therefore, you will find that most of the great mahatmas have advocated a life of involvement and service rather than one of retreat. Once you are able to overcome your karmas and samskaras, you can automatically, effortlessly, move into this other state of life and then the mind will not be a problem.

It is the nature of the senses and mind to constantly seek new inputs of pleasure, something which makes us feel the joy of life. Even that craving for new inputs is mental and not spiritual. The life of spirituality is *shoonya*, which has been defined by Buddha as *nirvana*, freedom from bondage, or *moksha*, freedom from material, sensorial and mental bondage and merger with a spiritual consciousness.

There is a progression in spiritual life, just as there is in academic life: from primary school to high school, college and university, then specialization.

Why do negative qualities have a greater force than positive qualities?

Negative qualities are more deeply related to our sense of individuality and sense of security. Virtues or positive qualities do not belong to the dimension of survival.

One brings about a contraction of the personality while the other brings about expansion?

Yes. In the process of becoming and the process of being, negative traits belong to the dimension of becoming and positive traits belong to the dimension of being. What do you want to become? You will act according to the end that you have envisioned for yourself in the process of becoming. That is how life is set and conditioned. For example, I want to become a successful businessman; that is the goal I have set for myself. In the process of attaining this end, I may have to carry out many manipulations and computations.

I once went to a program sponsored by the Indian Oil Corporation for the selection of ten trainee executives. Three thousand applicants all had the same desire to secure one of those positions, but they each had to compete against two thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine people. This resulted in many people getting ulcers and incredible mental problems, such as stress and anxiety. Those who were not as brilliant as the others were getting depressed, thinking that they would lose. Many people were trying to get into the good books of the examiner by complaining about the others. People brought gifts as bribes.

If you talk to such people about virtues, what will they be able to understand and incorporate into their lives? They will first talk about their families. After they have secured their position, then they will listen to you, but until then there is no way you can dent their armour of self-interest.

Can you really blame such people for being in that position?

I am not placing the blame on anybody; I am just noting a particular trait which was present in each and every one of them. There are many things they could have done to be in the race and still have avoided depression, anxiety, ulcers and sleepless nights. So many people lose their mind if they are unable to achieve what they aspire for.

Ultimately you are talking about surrender to the inevitable?

No, not even surrender. Do your duty and do not think about the results. As the *Bhagavad Gita* says, do your duty but have no expectations.

You have to know yourself in order to achieve that.

You need to have a basic understanding of what you want. Even the idea of surrender must be there in the mind in seed form. You cannot just say, “I am now going to surrender”, and surrender in one minute.

Is there any conflict between knowing what you want and doing your duty?

If you are established in a job and a pattern of thought, then there will be no conflict, even though what you may want and your duty seem to go in opposite directions.

Is it true that there is a place in Vrindavan where nobody can stay after dark?

There is a place in Vrindavan, in the area where Krishna is supposed to have lived which has been maintained as a park, and it is true that nobody can stay there after dark. It is surrounded by high buildings on all sides. Those who stay there are found insane the next day, if they are found alive at all. Many have tried to unravel the mystery of this place, as so many people have disappeared from there. Those who survive the night die within one month of going insane.

All the trees there are a maximum height of six foot. The contrast between the trees which surround the roads and houses, and those in the park is incredible. They look ancient. Many people believe that the trees are all the different gods which come alive at the time of Krishna's dance. That is the place where Krishna was supposed to have played his dance, the *rasa lila*. On full-moon nights, the music of the flute can be heard coming from there, as well as

the sound of *ghunghroo*, ankle bells, as if many people were dancing there. There is a room in which they make up a bed and lock the door, but the next morning the bed is unmade as if somebody has rested there.

No animal stays there at night. During the day the place is full of monkeys, squirrels and birds, but by six o'clock they all leave. Inside there is a water tank covered with thick green algae and bubbles, but if you take the water in a pitcher, it is crystal clear, totally pure and transparent. You can drink it.

Those people who have lived to tell the tale before their death, have said just one thing, "Dance! Dance!" That is all; and within a month they die.

Do they die happy?

Yes. Their eyes look as if they are seeing a different place altogether. There are many such spots around Vrindavan where you can feel that something mysterious is taking place, but you cannot quite put your finger on it.

Can one's guru be one's ishta devata?

The guru is initially the symbol. Later on, when total identification with the image or with the quality that the guru represents, takes place, when the mind merges with the guru image, he becomes one's ishta devata.

With the ishta devata there has to be a merger of the individual mind with what is being seen, with the quality that is being experienced. However, with the symbol this merger is not important. In meditation you can be a passive observer of the symbol which becomes a tool for increasing the depth and objectivity of meditation.

In the case of the ishta devata, there is a connection with your emotions and aspirations. If you have the guru as your ishta, then the emotion that is felt for the guru will be involved and your aspirations will also manifest in the image of the guru. There is total personality involvement in the ishta devata which is not so with the symbol.

Should one choose an ishta devata even if there is no strong attraction to one form?

I suggest that you use the normal symbol as your sadhana, and whatever appears in the course of time, go further in that direction without stopping your sadhana. You may be a sannyasin, a sadhaka, a Born-Again Christian or a Buddhist, it does not matter, but there has to be a clear understanding of what your psychic manifestations are concerning the ishta devata. If you are attracted to more than one form, the best thing is to become a nirakara, where you can just keep on including the traits and qualities of all the different forms in one.

Why did you isolate yourself in 1990 and cancel programs which you were to conduct?

There comes a time when one has to forget one's previous mental programming and create a new one. That means learning again many things which have been missed or which have been taken for granted. Previously, I lacked experience. I lacked accurate and sufficient knowledge and awareness due to the type of lifestyle I had led.

There are very few people who are born perfect. Those who have good samskaras or good karmas can be counted on your fingers. In the history of mankind there have been only a few. Others have had to struggle hard, maybe not reaching their goal but always making an effort. This effort is not based on ego or self-identity, but is an expression of being natural and spontaneous. One has to be oneself and not superimpose a different identity upon oneself. That has been the lesson that I have learnt from my guru and that we all have to learn from his example.

There is a story of a guru who went with his disciples to a fair where they were having an archery contest. Each person was given a bow and three arrows to shoot. There was a prize for the one who could hit the bullseye. The guru entered the competition, picked up the bow and one arrow and with an air of overconfidence shot at the target. The arrow went

wide of the mark. All the disciples began to laugh, “Our guru cannot even hit the bullseye and claims to be our guru.” The guru picked up the second arrow and very timidly shot again. This time the arrow fell far short of the mark. Again there was laughter behind his back, “Our guru cannot even shoot straight.” At that point the guru swung around and faced his disciples, saying, “The first person who drew the bow was overconfident. The second was unsure of himself. Now watch.” He picked up the third arrow and released it with a calm, concentrated and measured ease. It went straight into the centre of the bullseye. The guru collected his prize and slowly walked away as if nothing had happened. The disciples, eager now to understand the message their guru had been trying to teach them ran after him and asked, “Who was the third person who shot the third arrow into the bullseye? The guru simply replied, “Me.”

We can all learn a great lesson from this because we tend to become overconfident, and then in the face of failure we lose self-confidence. There is no gain anywhere. That is what I had to learn; to be myself. Previously I was an overconfident person; I do not think I have ever been unconfident. Before getting to that point Sri Swamiji stopped me and said, “Be yourself!” My own personal training is something I will always cherish, and I look forward to more opportunities where I can relearn to be myself.

How can yoga help us cope with the problems of stress and imbalance in our daily life so that we can find peace of mind?

Stress is a product of our overdoing things in life. We all go through various phases in which there must be some ups and downs. A graph cannot be one straight line. In order to see the progress and growth in life, you need to have a graph which goes up and down, up and down.

Sometimes at the peak of our happiness and attainment we experience euphoria. That is known as extremely positive stress, while at the low point, when we begin to experience

depression, neurosis and anxiety, it becomes distress. The balancing aspect of life is stress. You need to have balanced stress, not distress which creates physical, mental and emotional problems. Having no stress is equally bad, because it limits the vision of life.

There has to be a broad vision and balance. In this balance there has to be integrity and in integrity there has to be perfection. They all go together. If there is integrity there will be perfect action and if there is perfect action there will be total balance. It is rather like scales, where the needle always has to point at zero, in the centre. If the needle goes to one side, it means that side is too heavy.

Unfortunately, we have been missing a very simple point. Why do these ups and downs affect our lives? Yoga holds that there has to be a combination of the four *purusharthas* or efforts made by us. They are artha, kama, dharma and moksha. This has been the philosophy of the sages for many thousands of years, but somewhere down the line a misunderstanding took place and it was decided that out of the four *purusharthas*, artha and kama were for worldly minded people while dharma and moksha were for the spiritually minded. This is the mistake we have made for which we are now paying.

The *purusharthas* are like the four wheels of a car and up until now we have been driving our car with two punctured wheels. Swamis and sannyasins have been driving their car with the two wheels of dharma and moksha, but without the wheels of artha and kama. The *samsaris* or people involved in the world have been driving their car with the two wheels of artha and kama while the wheels of moksha and dharma were punctured. What happens in this case? There is a clash of ideas, desires, ambition and ego. There is a clash between action and ego, between thought and action, and so there is always disharmony.

Artha means social security. The first treatise on *artha shastras* or economics and social functioning was written by a sadhu and a sannyasin, not by a businessman. What does this

indicate? It indicates that the great thinkers of the past did not think only of renouncing the world. They did not think in terms of spirituality alone, but also in terms of economics and society.

Kama is also a very important factor. Kama, in this context, does not mean sensual pleasure. Kama is short for *kamana* or desire. It is the fulfilment of desire or ambition in one's life. I have ambitions as a sannyasin. You have your ambitions. If we begin to classify these into positive and negative, beneficial and detrimental, there will be many divisions. The fact still remains that ambition or desire is an integral part of everyone's makeup. No one is free from desire, not even God. God had the desire to create and to make us what we are. So how can we eliminate desire from our life? It is stupidity to think that we can.

There has to be a balanced approach to kama. Nothing in life should become an obsession. Everything can be used as a steppingstone to better our performance in society, in our personal life, and on the spiritual path also. However, because we have eliminated two wheels from our car, *artha*, which is also translated as wealth, has become an obsession with us. We not only crave financial security but also family and emotional security. We have so many needs and when they are not fulfilled there is suffering, conflict and mental tension.

Dharma means the development of the natural human qualities which are inherent in all of us and which represent the growth of personality, mind and consciousness. Dharma is not religion. It is described as *Dharayate iti dharma*, that which you express for the benefit of others and of yourself.

Moksha is freedom from limited thinking. It is having a broad vision of life and not being bound to set or fixed ideas. When you have universal vision you can begin to grasp reality. You can see that there are two experiences in life. One is of appearance and the other is of reality. They can be similar but they are miles apart from each other. How do you realize reality? Through wisdom, knowledge, awareness

and experience. When there is realization of the reality that encompasses both the individual and the universe, it is the culmination point of moksha.

The purusharthas are ways to better our life, but due to the division which has come about we cannot find this balance. We cannot understand how to live and interact with life. There is always a superimposition of ideas in our behaviour and attitude which causes tension and stress, inhibiting the free expression of our personality. That is why there is *ashanti*, unhappiness. This unhappiness can take any form, for example, a physical sickness or a mental problem.

If your mind is turning upside down and you leave the city and go to the mountains you will not find happiness and peace there. Instead of searching for peace and happiness, if you are able to locate the cause of your unhappiness then you will not have to search for peace at all. You just have to locate the reason for your being unhappy and losing your peace of mind and try to resolve the conflict. The moment you do that you will no longer be disturbed and you will not have to ask me how to attain peace, because it means that an awareness has been generated, which will enable you to begin looking at your own life, actions and expressions from a different perspective.

This is where yoga comes in. Here I am not talking of any specific yoga, like hatha or raja yoga, but the total spectrum of yoga and the proper practice which is given to us by a teacher who understands the need of the practitioner. It is possible to come to the stage where, by following a balanced program of asana, pranayama, bandha, relaxation and concentration techniques, we are able to find perfection within.

I do not believe that powers exist which help people overcome their problems. If I advocate that I will be telling a lie. The power exists within one's own self. The strength actually lies within us, but due to our inhibitions we are not aware of that rich source. Our weaknesses become the clouds which hide the sun.

We have to accept ourselves as we are. There has to be gradual recognition of our weaknesses, strengths, desires, needs, ambitions and so forth because this is not the age in which divine powers are going to manifest within us. No, the times have changed.

It is said that the grace of guru works. It does for some people, there is no doubt about it, but those people have a different mentality, a different way of thinking, feeling and accepting. They have open hearts and open minds and they have surrendered to one idea. For them guru's grace will work, but most people do not have open hearts and minds. They have not let go of their accumulated inner junk. When their cup is full of rubbish how can clear and fresh drinking water be poured into it?

First of all, we have to clear out what we have accumulated inside. That was the instruction that was given to Sri Swamiji early on by his guru, Swami Sivananda: "Look, you have taken sannyasa, but you have to exhaust your karmas, you have to empty yourself", and that is exactly what he did. He decided to do something which would benefit others, so he established the yoga movement.

In the early days people used to think he was a madman talking, because he used to say that yoga was the need of the individual, the science of an era and a way of overcoming many physiological and psychological problems. He also advocated yoga in education. In those days yoga was confined to just a few and the actual approach to yoga was unknown by everybody. Even the books by the great masters are full of theory and there is no actual practice given.

Sri Swamiji was the first to actually give clear-cut practices for the problems people encounter in their daily lives. What he said thirty years ago is now happening. People are embracing yoga as the means to a better life. Whether on a physical, mental or spiritual level, they gain from yoga, as it provides a system of learning and living. It is not just a prescription to be handed out like one hands out pills:

“Practise twelve rounds of surya namaskara and talk to me tomorrow.” It is a complete experience of body, mind, emotions and spirit.

We have to begin viewing things from a different angle. We have got on the wrong bus of high expectation and achievement without knowing ourselves properly. Then, when our weaknesses manifest we say, “My God, I have been practising yoga for so long and this is happening to me now?” or “I have been practising yoga for fifteen years, I should not have had a heart attack. I should not have any mental problems. I should not have anxiety attacks and depression and yet I am so depressed!”

The reason is that we never took an inventory of our life before starting to practise yoga. In business you have to take stock every six months. Why don’t you make an inventory of your life at least once a year? If you do that then very many things will instantly change for the better.

Apart from this, you have to have a universal vision. I do not mean that you look at the universe and say, “Oh yes, I am one with that.” Having a universal vision means having an awareness that extends beyond your self-centred perception. It means extending your awareness and imbibing and seeing the validity of another person’s point of view. If you can do this then you will not be the same, you will be a real human being.

When one dies, how are samskaras passed on? Are they in seed form? Do they evolve? What is the difference between spirit and samskara?

The spirit moves in the gross dimension, along with the six indriyas, the five senses and the mind. When you change house, you take your luggage with you. The same applies to the spirit. Similarly, on the gross dimension, if there is a change of body, then all the samskaras, karmas and other things are carried by the jivatma to the new body.

There is a difference between the meaning of spirit and soul. I would relate spirit with the jivatma, the tantric

definition, and soul with the atma. The spirit in the gross, subtle and astral dimensions carries the baggage. The moment it leaves the astral dimension it evolves and everything is left behind.

Are some samskaras made of a kind of physical substance carried in the material body, and some of a spiritual substance?

Physical samskaras are left behind, but the desires, cravings and the inherent desire to evolve continue to exist in seed form in the jivatma. The moment the jivatma or spirit enters the soul or atma area, then all this is burnt up and finished off. The seed which has form, and is identifiable, dissolves. It is said that the samskaras are in seed or latent form. According to the environment and condition in which the jiva or spirit lives and acts, they manifest or become active. In the end you can destroy them, scorch them, or keep on repeating them. You have to repeat them when you are not able to go beyond their active form.

Then rebirth takes place on the astral plane?

Yes.

If someone dies with desires or attachments, they never merge with the atma but stay on the astral plane and are born again?

Yes, unless or until their energy propels them to move forward; but it has to be powerful for that to happen. Impressions of one life are carried forward to the next. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* that when the wind blows it picks up the fragrance of the rose and carries it along. There might also be something rotting at one particular point in space and time, and the wind carries that putrid smell with it a long distance until it dissipates. The experience that you are having right now is within the confines of time and space, and you do not know when it will dissipate.

Buddhism says that in this life we prepare for death and dying. Could you shed some light on this matter from your own wealth of personal experience?

Those kinds of teachings are geared towards the overcoming of fear and the seed of self-preservation. Buddhists say that at the moment of our death, whatever we are thinking about or looking at or wanting, that we will become.

At the time of death, for a period of twenty-one days the spirit remains near the body. The actual process of death can take a long time, so what you are thinking about when you are going to die does not just take one moment, it is a whole process of thinking.

There have been clinical deaths on the operating table where the spirit has come up and out of the body. It has seen all the doctors frantically trying to revive the body. The spirit can move through anything before passing from the gross to the psychic or subtle levels.

Once I went to a morgue and saw dead people. For two weeks after that I started doing sadhana with the purpose of wanting to know more about death. Seeing the cold dead body, white, heavy, devoid of prana and sensation, had an impact on my perception of life. I had an incredible experience about death. I do not know if it was my imagination or my own ideas manifesting in the form of a vision, or whether it was something real. When I think of that experience, it was so real and vivid it was definitely an out-of-body experience.

Ramana Maharshi had death experiences when he was a child. That was the turning-point of his life. In Sri Swamiji's early childhood he used to become unconscious and people thought that it was epilepsy, but it was not. It was a death experience that also changed his entire life.

Are these out-of-body experiences the same as what happens in sleep?

They happen instantaneously, while in sleep there is preparation and the knowledge and awareness of going off

to sleep. Here, there is nothing; before you can blink an eyelid you are off.

Could you say it is something like what happens at the time of liberation?

Not liberation in the sense of liberation from earthly bondage which keeps you confined to the dimension of karma and samskara. Intensity has to be there; then I am sure liberation can be had. Here you are not working on a physical level, but on the level of energy.

If you merge one flame with another flame it becomes bigger and brighter. It loses its original form and shape and becomes larger. When you give that kind of positive and pure input into the spirit, then it has more power to get out of this earthly dimension, the elementary dimension, and reach the non-elementary level.

In the West there is a tendency of relatives keeping people alive who are dying and who are ready to depart. What do you feel about this?

My feeling is that interference with the normal process of life and death is not good. I believe in the natural process. If you keep somebody alive as a vegetable, what is the purpose? You are just delaying the person from moving on to some other place. This is a form of attachment as well. In the United States I have seen storage facilities where you can freeze a body and hope that a cure will be found in the future so that the person can be brought back to life.

I was reading a science fiction story in the US, which told of some people who had died and their bodies were put into a mountain crypt, with the hope of them being cured in the future and brought back to life. Many years passed and the country went through many changes. The atmosphere and environment had also changed. One day the crypt cracked open and because of the changed environment they came to life. When they came out of the crypt they saw total devastation. The whole human race had been wiped out by

nuclear war. There was no vegetation, no birds, nothing. It was the radiation that had cured them, but when they came out there was nothing. That seems more possible than finding a cure.

Please explain the meaning of alakhbara and akhara, and the difference between these and an ashram.

Originally, sadhus and swamis generally used to live high up in the mountains, in inaccessible places, following their own spiritual pursuits, and society held them in great esteem. The mandates of the king were never binding in the places where sadhus stayed. This was the original concept of alakhbara.

However, in the course of time this evolved into the ashram concept, where aspirants or young people desiring to learn would go and live with the guru for a period of twelve years. These ashrams became like schools of education where different kinds of training were given in spiritual, scriptural, social and economic education in relation to society. In older times, ashrams were places of learning or universities. This was the second transformation of alakhbara: from an independent sadhu practising his own sadhana in inaccessible regions, to ashrams which trained aspirants in the arts of life.

Later on, due to political changes and ideological differences, the ashrams were neglected, so ashrams started going to society rather than society coming to the ashrams. In those days ashrams were in the forests; now ashrams are in the cities. This was the third change.

The fourth change that the ashram culture underwent was the diversification of activity and the accumulation of a motley bunch of people, each having a different aspiration, as is the case in Ganga Darshan today. Some come here for sannyasa, some for yoga, some for an extended six month holiday, some just to have a look at the place and see what is happening, and some for physical or mental reasons, believing that by staying here they will get over some block in their personality.

Sri Swamiji has gone back to the original concept of ashram, alakhbara, a place which nobody is allowed to visit. It is not like an ashram where anybody can go at any time, knock on the door and the door will be opened. Alakhbara is a place for sadhana only. The sanctity of the environment of the akhara and the aim of the alakhbara is different to that of an ashram. While you are in an ashram you have to unlearn everything, but when you go to the alakhbara you have to go empty. Most people change at the time of sadhana and we do not really know what the mood of Sri Swamiji will be on the day we arrive. Maybe he will say, "No I am not seeing anybody", because he may be in a different state of mind. Maybe he will sit and chat with everybody individually, or maybe nobody will get to say a single word.

There should not be any kind of expectation, and the idea should be to imbibe whatever is being given. Water will only fill that pot which is empty; a pot which is already filled with water cannot receive any more. Do not go with the idea of asking him what you should do for your sadhana, or whether you should become a sannyasin or a householder, a businessman or a beggar.

The other aspect of alakhbara was akhara, which means a place where martial training is given. During the invasion period, when social, spiritual and religious values were under attack by different groups, the swamis formed their own military army. There are records of swamis fighting against the Muslims during the Mogul invasion, and there is also evidence of swamis fighting against suppression from the British Raj. The British used to have ships, guns and a modern army, but the swamis were an unclad army, with no uniforms, just bare bodies, maybe not even a piece of waist cloth. Just the sight of these naked figures with matted hair, wielding spears and swords, yelling and rushing at them, was enough to give the imperial army of the British a heart attack. They won many battles too! These training centres were known as akhara. Unarmed combat, self-defence techniques and the use of various arms were taught there.

There was an uprising in Bengal during the time of the British and at the forefront of this uprising was *Ananda Math*, one of the akharas which is still in existence today, *Ananda Akhara*. This group of warriors was known as the *astradharis* or weapon-holders. The other spiritual group was known as the *shastradharis* or holders of the scriptures. The name of the place where Sri Swamiji resides is *alakhbara*, the place of the holders of the scriptures or those who have spiritual knowledge.

To live in an alakhbara, and they are virtually nonexistent now, one is required to have a different kind of mentality to the norm. To live an ideal with full force of mind and spirit, without any distracting thoughts, requires a person with certain qualities and calibre.

Sri Swamiji has said that his aim is to merge body with spirit while being in the body. Now he has given an indication of the direction in which he has to go. We have read that the merging of body and soul can happen, but we have not experienced it. Maybe he will be the first example in this age to show it can be done. The fruits of sadhana done without any personal motive involved are very powerful. The depth of such sadhana is like that of the ocean. If you want to get some result from your sadhana then it is like digging a channel from the ocean and allowing a limited flow of water to flow inland; you cannot transport the whole ocean there. In the same way, the result of sadhana, if it is to be used in life, is very difficult to attain because the intensity of force is lost. It has to be directed according to the present level of mind and lifestyle. If one has no ambitions, one lives in that ocean of power.

There is a saying, “Sprouts come when the seed dies. The seed has to die before sprouts can come.” Freedom is achieved when the ‘I’ dies. ‘I’ is a very big thing. The potential to kill this ‘I’ is in everyone, but not the courage. Often we say, “Beautiful, I want to do it!”, but when the actual moment of trial comes we say, “You demonstrate it first.” The words of Swami Sivananda come to my mind:

“Within you there is the immortal soul. Kill this little ‘I’. Die to live. Lead the divine life. Within you is the fountain of joy. Within you is the ocean of bliss.”

Most of us have seen Sri Swamiji in the role of a yoga teacher, but not in the role of a sadhaka. He has an open nature and he is not restricted to one role. When he is speaking, everybody sitting there will think he is speaking to them directly. He is just speaking generally but the message reaches each and everyone personally. That is one trait of his. Another is that you do not have to ask him questions or put thoughts into words. When such souls reach a high level of spiritual evolution other beings actually become naked in front of them, for they live in the dimension of energy.

What are thoughts? Energy. What are feelings? Energy. What does one want? Energy. People like Sri Swamiji do not look at your body and do not even try to pick up what is in your mind, nor do they wait for your expression. They communicate with your energy field and many questions which you have not even asked are answered, because they are communicating on the level of energy. This has happened to me with him many times. People go all the time with perhaps ten questions, but while he is talking to some other person he answers all their questions. They do not even open their mouths but simply leave having received the answers. Interaction with such people does not happen on a physical level.

Can you give examples of those who have attained the level of Sri Swamiji?

I can give many examples, but I will only refer to people you will have heard of. One is Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Although his title remained Paramahansa, he was in the final stage of turiyatita. For him the whole world was just a manifestation of Shakti, the Divine Mother. He never saw any difference between what is good and what is bad. He was a person who practised every form of sadhana. He could live

in any culture. He underwent initiation into the sannyasa parampara and had the vision of Shankaracharya. He lived the life of a Muslim ascetic and had the vision of Mohammed. He lived the life and the discipline of a Christian and had the vision of Christ. You will find all these instances in the autobiography of Ramakrishna. He was not only a person with universal vision, but he lived a universal life.

Another name that comes to mind is Ramana Maharshi, a very great saint. The title 'Maharshi' can be related to avadhuta, and 'Brahmarshi' to turiyatita. He was actually a Maharshi who had attained and perfected the state of avadhuta and moved on to the stage of turiyatita.

Adi Guru Shankaracharya himself was a paramahansa sannyasin. He revived the paramahansa tradition originally founded by Dattatreya, a guru who is lost in remote antiquity. Shankaracharya, the reviver of the paramahansa order, was the first in this modern age.

Prior to him there were many other saints. In the Nath Sampradaya, Gorakhnath and Matsyendranath were avadhutas. They were the codifiers of hatha yoga. Nath yogis are hatha yogis.

Contemporary to Ramakrishna Paramahansa was Totapuri, who was also a turiyatita sannyasin and happened to initiate Ramakrishna when he was wandering about in Varanasi.

Historically, there have been many people in the different classifications who have attained the level of Sri Swamiji. The jignasu, karma, kutichaka, bahudaka, poorna and hansa stages of sannyasa are just preliminary stepping stones. They are the steps towards achieving different states of mind, vision and consciousness which develop with the stage of paramahansa onwards.

If we sincerely analyze the lives of sannyasins and sadhus of some worth, we will find a common thread. They gave up life as we know it today for a totally different life; new, alien and foreign to our thought, mentality and vision of the world and nature. They also experienced something extremely

deep regarding their relationship as individuals with the cosmic forces working on different levels.

A person can have command over the faculties of the mind. He can most definitely tele-transport himself. Every power of the mind is within his control. The forces of nature also obey his commands. What happened, according to the Bible, in the life of Christ? He had the ability to calm the winds, to walk on water. That is one example of how a person can control and direct nature. One can go even further than that, from the realm of mental awakening to the realm of siddhis and beyond, until there is nothing remaining but a direct experience of the final point of universal consciousness.

This interaction between an individual and the higher self was actually experienced by these sadhus or renunciates who were sannyasins, swamis, wandering mendicants and heads of institutions.

There are few who can be called sincere seekers, who think not only in terms of their own benefit but that of the whole community, and who can work towards that also. Take the example of Sri Swamiji. He is a person who had the opportunity to become an international sannyasin. However, he has rejected every kind of lifestyle that we would consider higher than our own life. Although he used to meet with presidents and prime ministers, he was equally at ease with the beggars out on the street, sitting with them, eating with them, without any pomposity. He had attained equal balance between the highest level of social recognition where there is total comfort and ease, and the lowest level of the social structure, one day sleeping in a deluxe five-star hotel and the next sleeping on the bare ground under the open sky.

This kind of self-control or mastery over these two different states is an effort which creates a precedent. It can be done. It is not simply an idea.

I have seen Sri Swamiji in many different roles: as a disciple, as a guru, as a sannyasin, as an administrator, and as an individual. However, at the same time, he was none of these; he was totally different and distinct from what

was happening around him. He was a living example and inspiration of how the things that one desires, thinks and reads about can be a definite reality to be attained.

Even his departure from the ashram and what he is doing now is something that an ordinary person cannot do for even one day. It takes a person of his calibre. Just to have mastery over the experiences of the body, where he does not feel the effect of the four fires and the sun on him, and his body is not adversely affected by that condition itself, speaks of a different state of consciousness.

At the gate of the Alakh Bara there was a picture of Kali. Can you explain something about it?

Kali is the shakti of time and she is also known as the destroyer. Time destroys everything. The power which rules and governs all the changes, time, is Kali. She stands on top of Shiva. Shiva is often depicted as lying in the prone position, *shavasana*, with Kali standing on top of him, representing the fact that even consciousness is subject to the power of time. Kali is naked, there is no covering on her body. Covering means hiding something, protection of some kind against something, whether it is cold, heat, dust or sweat. Covering oneself also means limiting or hiding one's inner nature.

However, Kali is naked, for time does not need to hide itself. It is a powerful force that governs everything and which can eventually finish off everything. The garland or mala of skulls represents that nothing in the manifest world is immortal. Blood, the fluid of life, is dripping from her mouth. That means she consumes life, because life is not beyond the jurisdiction of time.

Did Lord Rama really exist or is he just a symbolic figure?

Rama was the son of a king. In the course of time, due to his nature, qualities and good actions he was elevated to the level of a deity, a superhuman person. However, things have a habit of changing over long periods of time. In ten thousand years we will be asking the question, "Did Christ really exist?"

Nevertheless, there will be some kind of continuing belief, and it will be this belief and not the historical fact that will eventually become important. Today we consider history to be important, but it only relates to the past few hundred or thousand years. Anything more than that remains a part of prehistory and gradually becomes mere speculation or belief.

This happened with both Rama and Krishna. They were real, maybe not in the form of gods or avatars, but due to the time factor the historical facts have been lost and only belief remains.

One can never know the history of the world from the time of its birth. Our present historical facts will be altered in five or ten thousand years. Even now there are many theories about Jesus, but one belief remains constant; that he was an enlightened being whose power of giving elevated him to a high spiritual status. It is that image which keeps him alive within us today. Would it have made any difference whether he married Mary Magdalene, had three sons, or remained celibate? These details are only the speculations of historians, according to the evidence which they can gather. They do not change his teachings or the immensity of what he had to give.

When Troy was excavated, seven different cities were found built on top of each other, and now no-one knows which is the original one. Civilizations come and go. Cities are built and destroyed. There is a need for humanity to believe in something. Belief is very important and not to be denied. Belief is the only force that maintains our minds and emotions. However, belief should not become an obsession, for then it blocks other forms of understanding as well as the acceptance of other people's beliefs.

Can you comment on a project in the US where they are trying to create an ideal artificial environment for human survival?

There is currently a project in the US where an area of about seven acres of land has been covered with a glass dome. There are six people living inside who are totally isolated

from the outside world. Inside they have everything: desert, rainforest, ocean, all artificially created. Males and females are going to live there for an initial period of two years. They have included every kind of plant life, mineral life and animal life, as well as their own artificial sun, with absolutely no sight of the sky from inside the dome. At the press of a button they can have rain to grow their own produce. They call it 'Biosphere II'. The first biosphere is the earth which was created by God. The second biosphere is that created by the front-runners of humanity. It is really quite an amazing experiment, even though it is unnatural.

The purpose of this new project is to see how people can survive on another planet by recreating the same environment as on earth. It is an experiment of humanity which is beyond the earth. There are real trees and real plants, but they are all enclosed; only the sun and air are artificial. They have oxygen machines with which to make breathable air and they also use machines to make waves to create the impression of an ocean.

It is at this point that the death of a civilization usually occurs. The Egyptians and the Romans declined at the height of their achievement, and they were both militarily advanced civilizations. There is talk of Atlantis. They were also civilized in every respect, not only in military terms. They had knowledge of very deep things, as did the Lemurians. The Lemurian continent was known as Gondwana, and was situated between Australia and India.

There is a very specific natural law that the moment you try to control nature, nature will destroy you. It is said that we do not really appreciate nature. For example, a tree which takes so many years to grow, but which we can cut down in the blink of an eye, cannot be recreated by us. The environment that we destroy with industrial pollution and other things cannot be brought back by us. Nature is known as *jada prakriti*. *Jada* means the root, the seed of life. Nature will recycle itself, but at the time of natural elimination humans will also be finished.

What is the concept of drashta?

The attitude of drashta is more important than the concept of drashta. I will give you an example. We have been doing Shanti Path three or four times every day for the last two months and still not many people can chant it flawlessly. Why? Not because it is in Sanskrit, not because it is foreign to us or different in concept, and not because it is different from our normal day-to-day spoken language, but due to lack of our awareness in receiving incoming information. This lack of awareness is actually the complacent attitude of taking things for granted, “Oh, I do not have to worry about that now, it will take place again later.” It is an unconscious reaction to a particular environment.

If you are surrounded by an environment which is different to the norm, then initially you will feel curiosity. When people first come to the ashram, curiosity is the impression in their mind. The second impression is continuity. If something is going to happen only once, you will be more watchful and alert, but if you know that something is going to be repeated then the alertness disappears, and this dissipation of alertness is anti-drashta. With continuity comes the feeling of taking things for granted, “Oh, I can pick it up any time; I do not have to do it today.”

This attitude is a characteristic of a dull mind; it does not represent the sharp mind. The information is there, but it is not being absorbed. After some time the mind becomes lethargic. It seeks newness every moment, a new kind of input and stimulation. There is diversification of attention, awareness and alertness. It is a question of lack of training; our whole life and behaviour is untrained.

Drashta is just the reverse; it involves a process of training, becoming observant in all situations and having an immediate or spontaneous response to a situation. It is more than viveka. Viveka is more of an intellectual process. Drashta is a harmonious, synchronized response. Whether you are subjective or objective, the most important thing is awareness. One can become objective only at times, not

continuously. Initially one can, but not later on. That aspect of drashta which manifests naturally, without conscious effort, does not remain objective but becomes part of oneself.

Does one have to transcend the mind to become a drashta?

Once you transcend the mind there is no need to become a drashta. You can become a drashta right now.

Does drashta mean living in the present?

Many yoga practitioners say they have been practising yoga for so long but they do not feel there has been any gain. That is because they have become used to practices that are dynamic in nature and which do not alter the state of mind in relation to the drashta awareness. Somebody can practise asanas for twelve years and not have the experience of kundalini awakening, whereas somebody who has developed the drashta aspect can practise the asanas and begin to have psychic experiences in a very short time. Depth of self-awareness is lacking in the normal practices of yoga. When people say 'be aware' during a yoga practice, that awareness is mainly confined to the physical level and not the higher levels.

Can people become too emotionally involved in spiritual life?

That will happen in meditative or bhakti states, like the love between guru and disciple. There is a very deep emotional attraction sometimes.

As long as you have ambitions in material and spiritual life, that spiritual emotion will not evolve. It is not a question of submitting, it is a process of becoming free from ambitions. Someone comes to a guru and says, "Okay, I surrender", then after a while they seem so intimately devoted to the spiritual path or guru that for the first few years you think, "Oh, they have fused with the guru." Then suddenly, in the third year, the disciple goes off on his own guru trip or some other kind of trip and you wonder

what went wrong, as that disciple seemed so dedicated and devoted. Externally it may be a power trip, or any other kind of trip, but essentially it is ambition.

Ambition is the manifest aspect of destiny. Destiny is the seed, karma is the trunk, and ambition forms the branches and leaves.

Does everybody have ambition?

Not those who are aware of attachment and non-attachment and who can keep their balance through the pull of these two forces. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, it is said that the only powerful tool to cut through this spiritual and materialistic ambition and to change our destiny is *anasakti*, non-attachment. Anasakti is not rational or intellectual; it comes from the depth of one's being and from surrendering to that inner knowledge which is the invisible destiny of everybody. We all have to become something which is beyond the drive of ambition. That is the unwritten law. As long as we are subject to the influence of the senses, there is bound to be a sensorial destiny, the destiny of mind, body, life, family, society, environment, and so forth; the whole spectrum of human existence.

Do we have to fulfil our ambitions and live through the consequent karma?

There are different ways to travel. Suppose you want to travel between two cities that are linked by road, train and plane. If you go by road, there are turns and curves and ups and downs as well as breakdowns and everything else. If you go by train, there are not so many turns as you find on the road. However, if you go by plane then you bypass everything.

What if you do not know about the plane, train or car and you have to walk?

Everyone knows about them because everyone lives in them. Christ had experienced this, otherwise why did he propagate his philosophy. Buddha, he had also experienced all this.

The moment you take sannyasa, you get into either the train or the plane or the car. So why do you think you ought to start walking?

How does the misinterpretation of a belief by a disciple affect the guru? For example, how does the fact that Christians went to different countries and murdered people in the name of Christianity affect the karma of Christ?

Why go back so far? There were many people who returned their geru dhotis and malas which they had received during darshan after the news of Sri Swamiji's retirement from gurudom. So many people said, "If there is not a guru any longer, why should we continue to be disciples?" This goes against every type of teaching that the guru has tried to impart, that Christ imparted, and also against every type of moral and spiritual principle.

It is necessary to have some kind of clear aim in life which can act as the inspiring force towards fulfilling our commitment and following the guru's teachings correctly and sincerely. Many people take to sannyasa because it is the fashion. They just join the passing current, but the ability to lift their head up above the waves, look around and know, "Yes, that is the shore I wish to reach", is not there.

It all boils down to the fact that if there are ambitions and negative traits in the personality, your understanding will be incomplete and you will build a particular karma around your own actions. That karma will not affect the teacher because he imparted everything in good faith, so he has made his karma good. However, if he is directly involved then he may have to bear the brunt of the negative karma.

Can the use of drugs help the aspirant achieve a higher state of consciousness?

In the yogic tradition drugs have been discussed. The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali say that the experience of expanded consciousness can be achieved through the use of various

herbs, like cocoa when it is chewed or the soma plant. However, the state that is achieved is not permanent. It lasts only for as long as you take the drug. Eventually, you have to make it a conscious process, without depending on any external factor. Nevertheless, something does happen to the mind.

I can give you an example of a swami who, before he took sannyasa, had gone to a party and eaten some hallucinogenic mushrooms. He was an admirer of Paramahansa Yogananda at the time and had never known Sri Swamiji, he had not even seen a photograph of him. While under the influence of the mushrooms, he saw Yogananda's and Sri Swamiji's figures merge into one, with Sri Swamiji's figure remaining. One month later, there was a lecture by Sri Swamiji in the same town. The swami then went and saw that the unknown figure had been that of Sri Swamiji. This illustrates that drugs can cause the perception to change, and one can have a glimpse into the future. It is believed that in the continuity of consciousness, which is the knowledge of past, present and future, we are actually at one point. If there is a link with any other points, then we can become aware of the whole picture, but if that link is temporary, we again fall back into our same limited head-space without evolving further; we just have momentary flashes. If we have an experience which then becomes an enduring, living reality, it can be considered as evolution.

Does one have free will?

Our free will is limited only with regard to our choices. The road itself is already set out and we have to walk along it, but how we walk, zigzag or straight, therein lies our choice.

It is all dependent on choice. If you say, "It is going to happen anyway, whether I make any effort or not", and just sit down waiting underneath a tree for fruit to fall straight into your mouth, it is not going to happen. Destiny can only manifest when there is force, motivation or dynamism behind it.

What happens if people lack dynamism?

They remain in the same spot and there is no movement. Tamas prevails. There is no new accumulation or elimination of samskaras and karmas, just stasis, no growth.

In every stage of life there is a different condition to which you are exposed. If you get into a train, then you just have to sit down, but if you get into a car you have to drive, or if you ride on a bicycle you have to pedal. In the same way, destiny is motion, movement. If, however, you sit without any action, or any apparent direction, but there is some kind of movement taking place in other realms, then that apparent lack of direction is still subject to destiny. For example, you might just decide to sit, close your eyes and meditate. Apparently you are not doing anything externally, you are just letting things happen, rain or shine, but mentally and in other realms you are active. Only if there is *tamas* on all levels will destiny become ineffective.

How much influence do the planets have on our lives and how much of our destiny is in our own hands?

Some people may not agree with me, but I believe that we make, create and destroy our own selves. We make our own destiny and we destroy ourselves through our own ignorance.

If somebody is walking in the path of righteousness, then there is no power in the world which can change his destiny. If you have decided to do something from the bottom of your heart and you keep going, despite every difficulty that comes in your way, you will succeed, but if that determination or *sankalpa shakti* is not there then after only two slaps on the face you will say, "Oh, my stars are responsible for that."

I am not saying that they do not have any influence. Astrology is definitely a science, but every science fails when it is confronted with the force of human nature and of the mind. In our ignorance we try to put the blame on someone else for our own inability, or if not on them, it is the fault of the stars. The planets do reflect on one's life, certainly, but the human mind is more powerful than any star.

Is the end-point of all destiny to merge with universal consciousness?

Water will only flow down the slope and it will accumulate in the deepest part. Destiny is like a flow of water, it follows a course, and eventually it all goes to the sea.

What are the different forms of sannyasa diksha?

According to tradition there are three kinds: yogic, vedic and tantric. Vedic diksha is ritualistic and is performed with a fire ceremony, the chanting of mantra and a sankalpa in the form of “I, So and So, hereby thank my fathers and my grandfathers, and my great grandfathers for the past seven generations, without whose effort I would not be here today. I pray for their peace, and hereby renounce all my so-called social attachments, and dedicate myself to lead a spiritual life.” In the vedic tradition you have to inculcate the concepts of viveka and vairagya as the main sadhana.

Next, there is tantric diksha. It has two forms. One form is where initiation is given after an intense period of sadhana, in which one goes through a process of physical and psychological purification involving fasting, then chanting of mantra, mantra japa, and many other things. The other form is the method of transmission, the merger of mind with mind, spirit with spirit, and this is considered to be the advanced type. It is not necessary for anybody to be physically present, it can also happen over a distance. It can also take place with the disciple sitting in front of the guru, through the means of a meditative process. This merger helps to awaken the dynamic forces of the personality. It is more or less an unwritten process, a verbal tradition, which passes from guru to disciple.

The third and simplest form is yogic diksha. First, initiation is given, without any prior preparation, with the hope that the initiation is the starting point for the aspirant to sincerely follow a process of growth and transcendence. The certificate or the diploma is given first, with the hope that the disciple will complete the thesis. Most sannyasins fall

into this category, and ninety-nine point nine percent of us do not complete it; we just keep the certificate.

If one follows yogic sannyasa initiation with utmost sincerity, then it can also become a very effective method of adopting sannyasa. There has to be the desire and motivation to grow and there should not be any kind of spiritual ambition, which limits the growth of mind and the psychic nature.

Is there a way to discriminate between the true voice of the guru or ishta devata and a false voice in our dreams?

That is a very big problem. Initially, when we hear these voices, it is good to doubt them, in case there is no depth in these commands. We are extroverted people, and something that we feel could well be just our own projection or conviction; a way of satisfying our own desires. However, later on, as we meditate more and more and a link is created between the surface of mind and the depth of mind, then commands are not heard, they are seen, and those are the right ones. The image of the ishta devata or guru may manifest and tell us what has to be done. That would be the most reliable form of dream considering the level of the average mentality.

Then there is the sudden urge, deep motivation, or drive to do something. At this time you do not feel yourself to be different from either the ishta devata or the guru. That feeling of oneness, deep inside, will direct your actions, and you will begin to think, “Well, you know it is not rational”, but nevertheless it will be like an obsession.

These are the three stages and until you are able to convince yourself that, “Yes, this is the right message”, it is better to have it confirmed by the guru.

Does the initial recognition between guru and disciple come from a link of past karma?

There are two aspects concerning karma. One is spiritual karma and the other is worldly karma. Worldly karma is

what we face every day, which makes up our personality. Spiritual karma cannot be explained in terms of worldly karma. For example, when Ramakrishna saw Vivekananda for the first time he said, “I waited so long for you.” There was recognition of a spiritual link; that was a matter of their spiritual karma.

If the previous link had not been there, there would have been no recognition; Vivekananda would just have been like one of the many disciples who came to Ramakrishna, and nothing special at all. Spiritual karma has a very different role to play than worldly karma. Worldly karma is binding, whereas spiritual karma is liberating.

What role does initiation play in the relationship between guru and disciple?

Initiation is like turning the key to ignite a car, but unless the disciple is strong, powerful and firmly committed to his guru and his goal, the car will not move. It will simply be a waste of petrol. That is the case with many people. The disciple needs the guru in order to learn how to manipulate the gears and move.

In other words, the guru bestows grace through initiation. He tells the disciple, “This is the station and this is the frequency”, but the tuning in to that frequency is up to the disciple.

Someone once asked Sri Swamiji why gurus exploit, cheat or manipulate their disciples. He said that gurus never exploit, cheat or manipulate the disciple; it is the disciple’s angle of vision that makes him think he is being cheated, exploited and manipulated. If there is conviction, faith, devotion and surrender on the part of the disciple, then even if the guru wishes to exploit the disciple, he cannot do so. It is against spiritual law.

Take the example of Milarepa, who was open, simple and clear, and felt that whatever his guru did was fine with him. His guru used to beat him, starve him, make him carry rocks and stones to make houses, and then change the location, so

that he had to start building all over again. If we had been in Milarepa's, shoes we would have thought that the guru was manipulating and exploiting us for his own ends. However, Milarepa did not think like that at all, and ultimately he became one with his guru.

If one tries to analyze the relationship between the guru and the disciple with one's intellect, then one will always come to the wrong conclusion. When the disciple is unshaven in front of the mirror, his guru, the mirror will not show him his clean face. It will show him his own desires, complexes, inhibitions, aspirations and weaknesses. This is what the guru has to remove. He has to clean the disciple.

If one puts a hundred glasses filled with water out in the open air under the sun, the reflection will be seen in each one, but that reflection is not the true sun which is up in the sky. Similarly, what is perceived by each disciple in relation to the influence and approach of the guru is according to his mental and emotional framework, desires and ambitions. It is our own thinking that can take us closer to our guru or further away from him.

Could you discuss the reasons for wearing malas, the differences between the various types of malas, and how one decides which is the most suitable for oneself?

Every tradition uses a type of mala in the form of a rosary in order to repeat its prayers and mantras. The only difference is that in the yogic tradition the sadhus have discovered more about the quality of wood, stones and seeds. They found that each kind of wood, stone or seed emits a particular type of vibration, which is influential in restoring peace of mind and improving the outlook by making it more positive and tranquil.

Despite a wide variety of different malas, three are very common. One is tulsi, the wooden mala made from the tulsi plant. The tulsi plant is very hygienic with a lot of medicinal properties, and Ayurveda prescribes medicines made from tulsi for illnesses such as cancer. Tulsi has some very deep

properties which affect the body at the time of intake. The quality of vibration emitted by tulsi wood is very passive, tranquil and balancing.

Another form of mala is rudraksha, which are the large or small seeds of a fruit. It has been observed that rudraksha influences the cardiovascular system, lowers blood pressure, and corrects any type of heart problem; in both the physical and moral sense.

In the US, Kirlian research has been carried out on the emanations of the seeds, wood and stone generally used in malas. Tulsi proved to have well-balanced, well-proportioned blue emissions, which help to induce a sense of health and wellbeing.

Rudraksha had a different coloured spectrum, and the final analysis was that it is good for maintaining harmony of the internal organs. The crystal mala holds energy and vibrations within it, and also intensifies and purifies these vibrations. In the same way that a ray of sunlight passing through a prism is purified and separated into different colours, crystal intensifies the energy which we emit at the time of mantra japa and meditation.

These three malas are the most commonly used in the spiritual traditions. There are malas made of sandal and other kinds of wood which express a sense of purity and positivity. The reason why we wear a mala is to help us maintain balanced body energies and vibrations and to give us a positive mental outlook.

Can you tell me the meaning of the large shapes that I see in chidakasha dharana?

They could be yantras, mandalas or only symbols. Some people just see symbols: a square will appear occasionally, or an image of a triangle, a candle, the sun, moon or stars will show themselves. A good composition of a yantra is like a watercolour, but then one must decide which yantra it is that you have seen. Once you know which yantra or mandala it is, or what it represents, you can also know the state of your mind.

When I first began to experience shapes in chidakasha, I was aware that they were valid and not just images of my own fantasy. Sri Swamiji used to guide me through the process of interpretation because he understood the level I was at. He would tell me, “Okay, now do one month of surya namaskara and headstand, and nothing more than that!” This would often change the whole pattern of images I would see during chidakasha dharana. Therefore, not only recognizing them, but also having someone who understands the symbols of the unconscious, to guide you through, is very important. Furthermore, to know what one needs to develop and achieve in the early stages of the practice of chidakasha dharana is much more beneficial than just knowing the meaning of the symbols that appear.

When does the urge to surrender come?

Surrender only comes when you have the urge or the desire to follow the truth. When there is an awareness that “I am following the path of truth”, then faith will come naturally. That conviction that “I am doing something right for myself or for others” manifests in faith and surrender. As long as there is doubt in your mind, “Is this right or is that right?” you will not have faith.

In doubt there is no faith, no surrender, but when there is no doubt, there is everything. Even in a crisis, if you do not doubt your own ability and strength, then you will have faith, and that is a very big achievement. Self-power or *atmashakti* is necessary for everyone, whether spiritually inclined or not.

Faith and surrender are the opposites of doubt and fear. The more you try to rise above your mental limitations and overcome doubt, the more faith will be generated. If you have doubts or fears, that is the measuring tape of your lack of faith and surrender.

In the Bible, Christ said to Peter, “You will refuse to recognize me.” “How can you say that?” Peter replied. “Why will I refuse to recognize you?” In this way he was expressing

his faith. He affirmed, “I can never leave you. You can say anything you want, but I will not leave you.”

What happens when fear comes? Faith is finished, surrender is over. What happens when doubt comes? Faith is non-existent. That happens to everybody. Today you might like me and say that I am a nice guy. Tomorrow, if you find that I have done something ‘bad’, then the nice image will be finished.

Faith and surrender are symptoms of a balanced personality. Rather than trying to cultivate them immediately one should try, through a process of observation and awareness, to overcome one’s doubt and fear. That is the point at which one has to know oneself.

Can you talk to us about astral projection?

First of all, let us begin with the location of the astral body. Where is it? Is it just a faculty of the mind? Is it just a process of imagination? Or is it something real? The concept of an astral body is not very clear to many people, and it is considered to be something of a novelty. Everybody has a desire to experience this so-called ‘astral projection’.

Often our dreams and fantasies can make us believe that there is an actual astral projection, when in fact there is none. Conscious projection away from the body is known as astral projection. If we look at the structure of the koshas, we will find that two experiences of the astral body can take place: one which happens to ordinary people and the other which happens to spiritual aspirants and sadhakas. In each case, the astral experience occurs at a different level of the koshas.

The first astral experience takes place at the borderline between manomaya and pranamaya kosha. It is here that people leave their body, yet keep all their natural hang-ups, desires, likes and dislikes, and begin to move around and enjoy themselves. This is not the positive or creative type of astral projection.

The second level of astral projection takes place when you cross the boundary of pranamaya kosha and enter into

vijnanamaya kosha, on the borderline between pranamaya and vijnanamaya kosha. This is experienced by those spiritual aspirants who develop an innate ability to communicate with and to heal other beings on the astral plane.

Therefore, there are two experiences, situated at both ends of the pranamaya kosha. On the 'A' side of the pranamaya kosha, which overlaps the manomaya kosha, there is the one experience; on the 'B' side of the pranamaya kosha, which overlaps vijnanamaya kosha, there is the other experience. From this, it can be construed that astral projection is just a projection of the energy body combined with consciousness. Depending on which side you are on, the manomaya side or the vijnanamaya side, different results will be achieved and different experiences will be had.

There is more danger in astral travel when it happens on side 'A', as the manomaya kosha contains all the natural hang-ups which we have not yet overcome. There are also blockages in pranamaya kosha which we have not cleared; we have not gone beyond the pranamaya kosha. This 'A' experience can become, or is similar to, lucid dreaming, dreaming with conscious awareness. If I am having a dream and I am aware that I am dreaming, and I can make myself move and act in the dream according to my wishes and not according to the natural dream process, then that is known as lucid dreaming.

There is a difference between lucid dreaming and astral travelling, however. In lucid dreaming there is the awareness that "I am dreaming" whereas in astral travelling there is the knowledge that "I am projecting myself astrally." In a lucid dream it is not possible to go through walls and doors, but in astral projection there is the possibility of doing so. In lucid dreaming there is the possibility of knowing that, "This is fantasy and not reality", whereas in astral projection there is the knowledge that "what I am experiencing is reality." If you confirm it the next day then you will know that it has actually happened. For instance, you can go into a room and see the layout of that room and all the objects in the room.

Then, the next day you go into this room, to which you have never been physically before, and actually see the objects in the same places you saw them while astral travelling.

The only danger in the 'A' type of astral projection is losing oneself, losing the pranic balance and messing up the subtle manomaya and pranamaya koshas, which will manifest in the form of a psychoanalytical problem, or in the form of a deep psychological hang-up, fear or inhibition. Fortunately, not many people are aware of such astral travels.

The second type of astral travel is more positive and constructive. Here the subject has already crossed the threshold of pranamaya kosha and the pranas are active. There is the potentiality to reach out through that energy, through those pranic vibrations, and heal. I will give you an example to explain the second type of projection where the pranas are charged, active and travel with the astral body. One married lady who came here and who was leading a normal life, told us that once she was sleeping in her house while her husband was asleep in his parent's house. She projected herself astrally out of the body and went to the house of her in-laws, saw her husband lying there and touched him. She had a feeling like an electric shock, and her husband woke up. A few days later, when correlating these happenings, they found that her husband woke up at exactly the same time that his body was touched. A transfer of energy took place from her astral body into his physical body and that charge woke him up.

With proper training this ability can develop into a healing ability. Many people have seen somebody suffering a lot in a dream, with some kind of disease or problem. In the dream, a third person comes and gives them something: a flower, a symbol or a sign, and then the next day they are all right, the difficulty disappears. I can give you many examples of people who have told me that this happened to them, and the night before astral projection had taken place.

The main difficulty here is learning how to project the pranic energy constructively. There is a complete science of

astral healing. Just to give you a glimpse, the healing energy from the astral body is transferred either through the feet or through the arms into the body and never through the head, because the moment the astral body puts its hands on somebody's head there is going to be a short circuit. It is a totally different science of healing.

Pranic healing is also a technique of prana vidya, but a very advanced technique which has not yet been taught to many people. This category of astral travel can also be termed 'psychic shaktipat' where the spiritual aspirant's faculties can be made to awaken the potency of the chakras and kundalini. In fact, gurus perform this kind of distant shaktipat very often. This distant shaktipat is not just a concept; it is a reality and can happen even after the physical death of the guru.

Those of you who have read *An Autobiography of a Yogi* will know that when Sri Yukteshwar, the guru of Paramahansa Yogananda, left his body, Paramahansa Yogananda was staying in a hotel in Bombay. That very night he saw his guru materialize in front of him in flesh and blood. He touched him, talked with him, and then the guru dematerialized. This example belongs to the second category of astral projection. Physical manifestation is definitely possible after death. Condensation of prana is possible. It is this condensation of prana which makes materialization a reality.

When total consciousness leaves the body there is no awareness left in that body about what is happening to it. While astral projection is taking place, even if someone chops off the head of the body there will not be any knowledge of it. There will be no pain or suffering of any kind. The only difference will be that no matter how hard you try to come back to your headless body, you will not be able to do so.

Many people, including yogis, have described the connection between the astral and physical bodies in the form of a psychic umbilical cord, which is golden in colour. It is made up of points of light which move to form a continuous stream of light. The actual projection is from

manipura. If you understand the manipura projection then the whole process of astral projection becomes clear. What extends from manipura? Prana. What goes with prana? Consciousness.

Recorded cases exist where people are able to sever this link with the physical body, and move out over certain distances, but because they have not yet achieved a deep psychic meditative state, the attraction to the physical body, to the sensorial body, pulls them back. In the case of yogis this does not happen. Yogis are able to create a direct projection, like seeing an image in a mirror; there is no connection with the physical body whatsoever. No matter what happens to the physical body, one continues to live in the astral body.

There were many instances of this type in regard to Swami Sivananda, which I am not allowed to tell. It has also happened with Sri Swamiji. From the stories that I have heard, I can say that they are as fantastic to our minds and as real as the things that we read about in books. Yogis are not bound by physical attraction on the astral plane, whereas normal humans are.

Initially, when astral projection is taught, there is a very clear instruction given not to try and sever the pranic link which connects the astral body with the physical body. One can easily become a zombie if one does not receive proper training. Such imbalance can occur when we practise astral projection without having adequate control over our prana or mind, and without possessing knowledge of how to direct our astral self so that the projection of the astral body becomes a part of our evolution. In the first category of astral travel, there is no evolution. It is just like taking a trip down to the Ganga and back; nothing happens.

I remember, many years ago, towards the end of the 'hippy era' in America, there was a great deal of publicity about a travel agency which used to promote astral travel: "See anywhere, go anywhere in the world without spending a dime, learn how to travel astrally", and pay a couple

of thousand bucks to this travel agency! Such things did happen! However, it is not something one should attempt in that way. If it happens as part of the natural evolution of mind and personality, then it should be used constructively.

Playing with the psyche is like channelling 11,000 volts of electricity into wires within the body which can only take 220 or 440 volts. On the psychic level we are not playing with transformed energy which the body can bear. For that, the whole nadi structure has to be free from any kind of blockage whatsoever. The mind should be active and alert to accept this flow, this input of high-voltage pranic energy. Only then will the body survive that input of prana. Therefore, yoga is very clear in saying, "Go very slowly. Do not attempt things over which you cannot have control."

Many people want to awaken their kundalini without even knowing what it is. It is something that they have read about in books and they want to do it, but it is necessary to go slow and steady. Work on yourself gradually. Go through each step systematically and there is bound to come a time when you can experience things which are non-physical. When those things happen, do not try to rationalize them or understand them in terms of the physical body. That would be a great mistake.

Where is our awareness at the time of sleep? What is the state of our awareness when we are awake? They are two different things altogether. Only when we wake up do we realize that we have slept for so many hours. In sleep there is an absence of every concept of time, space and object. In deep sleep, people can come in and out of your room one hundred times and you will not even know that they have come and gone, whilst in the waking state you are aware every step of the way. These two types of awareness form two different poles. Do not try to bring one frame of awareness into the other and adjust it, because it will not work. One thing has to be made very clear from the beginning: be open and accept the situations as they arise every step of the way.

How can one protect the astral body from possible harm or interference during projection?

There are people who make it their business to intrude into other people's lives on the astral plane. There they alter things, which later on affects the everyday life of the person being intruded upon. Suppose I have a negative attitude towards someone and I want to control them or do something to harm them, I can best do so on the astral plane where they have no defence.

On the external plane there are many blockages. Rationality can be a form of protection; intellect, intuition and willpower are all protections, but how does one protect the pranic body? There has to be proper training in order to create a defensive energy field around the pranic body. Those teachers who are sincere will always teach you how to create that defence before they impart the actual technique of astral projection.

What is meant by surrender at its deepest level?

The true meaning of surrender involves a process or stage which has four major aspects:

The first aspect is the broadening of our inner vision, so that we are able to perceive different facets of life at one simple glimpse. It does not matter which technique or process is adopted to reach this stage, to make us aware of the little things which we hold on to for a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction.

The second aspect of surrender is a process of opening up which can happen on many levels. The various faculties of the mind, which exist in the form of compartments, have to be opened up. Just as a house has many rooms with closed doors, in the same way our mind has many compartments which are closed. Due to this, new impulses are not actually experienced and integrated by us; they simply become a process of intellectual analysis and remain at that level. Therefore, the second process of surrender entails an opening up of mind compartments. The experiences of life should be seen and fully experienced as they arrive.

The third process of surrender is having an open heart. Surrender means having a simple heart, which manifests through one's mental processes. It means being natural and spontaneous.

The fourth process of surrender is being open in one's soul. Surrender cannot be a head-trip. It is the expression of a state which is achieved after you have been able to develop confidence, trust and faith in your own self. Surrender is trusting yourself and having conviction in what you are aspiring for. It is believing in what you know to be right and having the confidence to reach out for new experiences.

Surrender does not imply blindly following the words of somebody whom you respect or love. If you follow the words of somebody you respect or love to the letter, you close off other compartments within yourself. This will stop you from having a broader vision.

One true example of surrender which I have seen is in the life of Sri Swamiji. He was away from his guru, but at the same time he found that whenever he closed his eyes and opened himself up internally, his guru would be there guiding him. That stage, where one is able to contact a higher reality at any time, is called surrender.

Can you please talk about the concept of dharma in the *Mahabharata*?

The concept of dharma in the *Mahabharata* is very broad in terms of duty and obligation towards others. According to the *Mahabharata*, your personal life is just a collection of duties and obligations which you have to fulfil in order to have a pleasant life and afterlife.

There are two groups in the *Mahabharata*. One is the Pandavas, who follow the path of dharma; the other group is the Kauravas, who are adharmic. Crookedness and selfishness is exemplified by the characters of Duryodhana and Shakuni on the Kaurava side. The lifestyle of the Kauravas is very selfish. They want to hoard, they do not want to share the kingdom with the other brothers. The

Kauravas are like modern society, where the concept of 'I' and 'mine' is at the forefront.

The concept of having a right sense of duty is very hard to understand, because before you can find it you have to discover the right sense of purpose in your own life. If you do not have a direction to your life, if you do not have the inherent motivation to be of use to others, then even if you perform the highest duty, it will not have any meaning. Duty is just a symptom of having that sense of purpose. The external actions are a symptom of an inner state. That is the main reason why most people do not understand their own actions.

Everybody talks about how karma yoga helps to purify one's personality and mind, but then it generally becomes something superimposed from outside and not something which unfolds spontaneously from within. Karma yoga is not something external. In the *Mahabharata* the only teaching is concerning karma. The sadhana prescribed is just a way to improve oneself so that one's karmas can be changed. Ultimately, the process begins with oneself. Duty is duty. How can duty have a right sense or a wrong sense? It is our attitude and approach to life and duty which gives us the feeling of inner peace and balance.

Duty has to be understood in relation to human nature. To illustrate this to you I will tell you a short story. Once a sadhu was taking a bath in the river. He saw a scorpion drowning, so he picked it up and began to bring it towards the shore. The scorpion stung the sadhu's hand and as his hand shook with pain the scorpion fell back again into the water. Again the sadhu picked it up and again he was stung. This happened many times. People who were watching said, "Let the scorpion drown; stinging people is a bad habit!" The sadhu said, "Look, the scorpion is bound by its own nature; it will continue to sting. I am bound by my own nature; I will continue to try and save it. If I have that feeling for my fellowmen then I should have it for an insect also." Karmas are tied up with one's nature and it is this individual nature which makes them appear either good or bad.

Most people in society are self-centred. They do not have a natural instinct to care about others. Is there a sadhana which could change their nature?

There is no sadhana for those people. As long as there is contentment, even if they are crooks, cutthroats or murderers, they will not change.

There has to be a turning point in their life, and that turning point only comes after *vishada*, crisis. The first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is 'Vishada Yoga', the yoga of crisis. It may be something physical or something deeply psychological, but some turning point has to come for such people before a real change can take place in their thinking process.

Yoga of course will help. For example, it may be hypertension which initially leads people to practise yoga nidra, yet after three months or so, as they become more involved in yoga, they begin to change. It is, however, very difficult to change human nature.

Are spiritual guides pure souls?

Spiritual guides, or angels as they are often called, are pure souls that manifest according to one's thought projection. Visions of such beings vary from country to country. Westerners tend to see angels; they rarely see devas. They may see the devil, but they may not see rakshasas. The form which you perceive, either with wings or without wings, with a crown or without a crown, is your own superimposition of an image. The purity is also superimposed according to your own projection.

There are two kinds of spirits. The pure ones are perceived as deities, angels or benevolent forces. Then there are spirits which govern the lower dimensions, who are also pure, but they are tamasic. It would be in their nature to instil fear or some other such emotion.

The colours of the rainbow may range from violet to red. They are all in the same dimension, but each colour has its own frequency and energy. Similarly, predominantly sattwic

spirits radiate one kind of aura, while predominantly rajasic spirits radiate a different kind. If you see a sattwic spirit you will be transformed by its good vibrations; if on the other hand you see a tamasic spirit you will be transformed by its negative vibrations.

Why will one person experience this while another will not?

We are always seeking contact with the spirit world, but we are never really aware of that contact when it does occur. The best period to have this contact is at the time of sleep, when the rational or sensory mind ceases to function. The time of deep sleep is also a good time. If there is a positive encounter, then people will say they had a fantastic dream or vision, while a negative encounter becomes a nightmare for them.

Those kinds of psychic fields exist everywhere in the environment and your sensitivity of mind can tune itself to their frequencies. They are like a passing wind which carries a smell. At night when you go to bed, if there is a strong influence passing through the environment, you can catch that and either have a once-in-a-lifetime vision or a wonderful dream, or a once-in-a-lifetime nightmare!

Can you tell us something about bhasma in the yogic tradition?

The horizontal lines of *bhasma* or ash which sannyasins wear on their foreheads represent the original form of matter. If you burn something, regardless of what it may be, what remains of that object? If you burn a body or a cloth all that remains is ash. Ash is always the pure essence of every created object.

Once we realize the pure essence, we can overcome the three *gunas* or qualities of nature. That is the symbolism behind using ash in three lines across the forehead. Realize the pure essence of your nature and you will overcome the three *gunas*.

Bhasma is found in graveyards, not sandalwood. Sandalwood is an item that Hindus use in their worship in the different temples, but not yogis. Vaishnavas and others use sandalwood, but not Shaivites; they use only bhasma from cremated bodies.

Can a guru who has achieved samadhi through jnana yoga train a disciple whose inclination is bhakti yoga, or vice versa?

In my opinion, yes. A jnana yogi can inspire bhakti in the aspirant and a bhakti yogi can inspire jnana in an aspirant. It is not a question of a bhakta training a disciple who is a jnani, or a jnani training a disciple who is a bhakta. It has to be viewed as a relationship between guru and disciple, not as an idea of jnana or bhakti.

Having established himself in that higher position, the guru has the ability to guide the disciple, regardless of the background or personality trait which is predominant. The disciple can be intellectual, physical, emotional or psychic. Regardless of his individual traits, the guru has the natural ability to nurture, encourage and support the disciple.

What is the difference between a clever person, an intellectual and a jnana yogi?

I consider the jnana yogi to be my grandfather, the intellectual to be my father and the clever one to be me. The gene is the same in all three: jnana or wisdom or knowledge. The experience of jnana is different in all three. My grandfather represents a wisdom which I and my father do not have. It is different than the wisdom which has come through personal experience of life.

I see my father working and struggling to maintain the family and to provide for my education, food and clothing. I see him using his mind to the maximum: thinking and analyzing, employing his intellect in order to achieve something. My father is still in the process of experimentation and does not have that final wisdom which

says, “Okay, enough with work and maintenance. Now I will enjoy myself.” I am the clever person because I think I know more than my grandfather and my father.

In my opinion, cleverness is immaturity of mind. When one tries to hide that immaturity of mind, then one tries to be clever. A person does not need to be clever if maturity has been reached. If maturity is there, then even the normal expression and behaviour will convey the message of maturity.

Cleverness is the lowest rung, intellect is the middle rung and jnana is the final rung of the ladder.

You have mentioned that jnana yoga leads to bhakti and bhakti yoga to jnana, and that there are just a few people who are jnana yogis.

It is an undisputed fact that bhakti yoga leads to jnana yoga. Here jnana is not to be considered in terms of intellectual knowledge and understanding, but as personal realization. The jnana of Archimedes came when he cried “Eureka” in the bathtub. That was a spark of jnana: “I have known it, I have found it, I have seen it, I have experienced it.” In that sense there are very few jnana yogis.

Those people who wish to follow the path of jnana yoga need to have intensity of mind, awareness, concentration and willpower. Without these qualities jnana yoga is not complete. Take the example of the person who says, “I am a jnana yogi, because every morning before breakfast I ask myself, ‘who am I?’” That is not jnana yoga.

Is there any protective mantra one should use when travelling on the astral plane?

It has been the teaching of Sri Swamiji that the repetition of one’s individual or personal mantra is the best defence on the astral plane, because it has been given by the guru according to your vibrations or energy pulsations, according to your manifestation of the chakras. Apart from this, those aspirants who do not have a personal mantra are taught

to create a white aura around themselves like a shield; to envelop themselves in white light. This is the way for people to protect themselves when there is no mantra.

The third way is through the use of a yantra, which has to be generated through *trataka*. Of course, you cannot carry a yantra with you on the astral plane. Initially, you must practise *trataka* so that the yantra becomes part of your consciousness, just as the mantra comes naturally to the mind when repeated many times. The yantra should also manifest itself spontaneously without any effort. That yantra can then be used on the astral plane as a protective shield. The yantra will vary from person to person according to their mantra, but in general tantra considers Sri Yantra, Kali Yantra and Shiva Yantra to be the most effective psychic defences.

I have seen different charts of the nadis, and in some they are depicted as moving straight up, whilst in others they are crisscrossing. Why?

The charts that show the nadis going straight up are describing the nadi system, and the charts which show them crisscrossing each other are describing the effect of the chakras after awakening, the transformation of the mental faculty of the chakras into physical activity. The physical activity which then normally occurs balances itself with the mental activity.

For the same reason, using the technique of *prana vidya*, we visualize the nadis crossing by moving our consciousness in a specific pattern with concentration and intensity of awareness. *Prana* is then experienced in the form of light currents. The light current force has to be wilfully directed through the different chakras following a crisscross pattern. The conscious activity which we perform initially will create this balance of mental and physical expression.

There is a book by Pandit Gopi Krishna in which he relates how his kundalini went up through one nadi and he had a totally different reaction. He became mentally imbalanced and lost all control. His thoughts were too fast

and his actions too slow. His motivation was moving at one speed and his behaviour was functioning at a different level, so there was total disruption of the so-called 'normal' personality.

When there is conscious direction of prana it always has to be directed in a crisscross way. If, by chance, through this conscious direction, pranic forces awaken within us, then they will have the corresponding transformation on both the physical and mental levels.

For what purpose and when should we use a hand mala?

To begin the process of ajapa. When the ajapa process happens to us, normally there is no effort and not even the awareness that it has started. We cannot bring that ajapa process into effect all the time. So, we can use a *sumerini*, the small twenty-seven bead mala, to reinforce the idea of ajapa and try to create an environment within us which will be conducive to that state. The *sumerini* can be used whenever you are chanting your mantra, whether with breath, with continuous repetition or at any time of the day while you are active.

Could you tell us a little more about the crossing of ida and pingala nadis. We are told they go straight from mooladhara to ajna, yet in the practice of swara yoga they are described as crossing each other at the chakras?

According to the theory and system described in some yogic texts, ida and pingala go straight up from mooladhara to ajna as two channels or nadis, but in other descriptions they cross each other. The crossing at the chakras is on a more subtle level, not the physical level of the nadi plexus or *medhra*. It is a descriptive form of the interchanging activity that occurs with the awakening of the chakras.

The nadis, in fact, do not crisscross. This is just a symbolic representation of what happens when the mooladhara and swadhisthana chakras awaken. The crisscrossing action represents the balance which is created between the mental

and physical activity processes when the ida and pingala forces are flowing freely. It may also represent the condition which can arise if the awakened prana goes up the wrong nadi, creating imbalance physically or mentally and causing the loss of self-control. This state can be termed as psychotic or schizophrenic. The crossing of the nadis is just a symbolic representation.

Many times Sri Swamiji has mentioned that a disciple should have unbroken awareness of the guru. Can you please elaborate on this?

In this context, awareness of guru means constant awareness of the inspiration, the goal and the direction that we have received. That is how I would interpret this question, because I can never imagine guru in a physical form. If I think of my guru, Sri Swamiji, in a physical form, as a body, then I will become blocked. I think of Sri Swamiji as the source of inspiration which has propelled me, which is guiding me and which will continue to guide me. I think of him as something that I can continue to love, to cherish and to hold dear, and that awareness of guru is constant.

I am giving you a very personal answer, because I cannot give a general answer to this kind of question. I do not know what kind of relationship you have with your guru. Some people tend to see their guru only from the physical point of view, "Oh, he is there; so we are okay." Others have an emotional link with their guru, similar to falling in love. It is very common for aspirants to fall in love with their guru because of some deep inner feeling of the heart.

This kind of awareness or obsession about the guru limits the vision of life. For me, guru has always been nothing more than an inspiration which has lifted me whenever I have fallen; it has been the strength which has powered my legs whenever they have felt tired. That is guru for me; a source of strength, inspiration, love, dedication and affection that I have felt coming from Sri Swamiji, guiding and taking me towards him. I could not care less for his

physical being. From an emotional perspective, yes, I do care, but from another perspective I could not care less. Do not misunderstand me. If I just tried to repay what I have received in life, it would be more than enough.

Yoga as such, asana, pranayama or meditation, have no attraction for me, as I can only go a certain distance with their help. It is that inspiration which I must cherish and protect from the outside influences and distractions. This is where the awareness of the guru comes in. If someone came to me and said Sri Swamiji is like this and like that, good or bad, there is no way I would be influenced by such talk. That might have been his experience, but it is not my experience. If somebody tells me that Sri Swamiji has made him lose his self-esteem, self-image or self-awareness, it will not turn me against Sri Swamiji. Why should I be swayed by another person's hang-ups, beliefs or experiences? My experience is different. This is a point that most people tend to miss because of their distracted minds. If someone says, "This person is bad", we begin to think, "Yes, this person is bad." Why? Because he had such and such an experience. If somebody says, "This person is good", we begin to think, "This person is good." Why? Because someone else had that experience.

Accept nothing, believe nothing, until you have experiential knowledge. Why do we not apply that in our present life circumstances? Why are we normally swayed by somebody else's hang-ups and phobias?

I do not think awareness of the guru can be maintained with such dissipated mentality. Please remember, I am answering this question from my personal point of view. I cannot generalize, because everyone understands, accepts and feels on a different level. Everybody is aware of their direction in life along with their ambitions, desires and motivations. No one is truly sincere in the depths of their heart. From the mind one can say, "Yes, I am sincere", but at the time of trial even Peter said, "I don't know who Christ is."

It is at the time of trial that our conviction comes into play. If we can maintain constant awareness of the guru in

the form of inspiration, guidance and direction, then that clarity and vision is sufficient to create a deep link with the guru, and as a sannyasin I aspire to have that kind of link. Other things have no attraction for me. Even sitting here and talking has no attraction for me, because what is the use of me talking when tomorrow you will still be saying and doing the same things anyway?

Internally, we are very weak. Our hard-headedness is not a symptom of inner mental, emotional or psychic maturity. Maturity is not just experienced in the natural process of growing up, it is a process of understanding things in the right perspective. Maturity is a process of *viveka*, discrimination. A child plays with toys, dolls, trains, robots and plastic machine guns. When he grows up and leaves those toys, do you call him mature? No, I would not call him so, because he leaves the plastic toys to play with living toys. Instead of playing with plastic dolls he tries to play with a living doll, that is the difference. Instead of playing with plastic, super-fast racing cars, he plays with the latest model of Alfa Romeo or any other sports car. Toys change, but immaturity remains.

When we are on our deathbed, we look back and see that we did not really achieve anything in life, and we feel depressed. We feel that our whole life was totally wasted, because we never grew up. In order to have constant and unbroken awareness of our direction, we have to grow up, and not be neurotic and psychotic in thought, behaviour and action. For some people, constant remembrance of the guru means to sit in front of him and stare at his face, all day and night. I have seen people like that who go totally berserk, you can see their eyes go round and round. They say, "Oh, my guru, I can never forget him." I cannot understand that. Sri Swamiji has not taught me to behave in this manner. He has told me, "Get out and stand on your own feet!"

In what direction do we wish our life to evolve? What kind of completeness, what kind of integrity, harmony, peace, conflict and joy do we want to experience in life? That has

to be clear, whether or not one is a sannyasin. Only with that clarity of mind, perception and direction can there be any kind of awareness which is constant and unbroken. It is this awareness which eventually leads to the unfolding of our inner nature. Where is the guru ultimately? Inside. It is the source of inspiration which we found first outside, and which we are now experiencing within.

Has Sri Swamiji renounced being a guru, and if so, what happened to his disciples?

He was a guru, yet never a guru. He was a traveller who was joined by other travellers on the way who wished to follow his directions. When the fork in the road came where he had to turn off, he turned off and we have to continue walking, following the path that he has shown us in the past and is now showing us through his example and expressions of universal insight.

Please talk about the sixth Buddha.

It is the Buddhist belief that there have been many Buddhas in the past. The most recent one was Gautama, one of the names of Siddhartha, who was later acclaimed as a Buddha. The Buddhist teaching prevalent in the world today comes from the Gautama Buddha.

The Jains have had twenty-four gurus, the last one of whom was Mahavira. The Sikhs have had ten gurus. The Buddhists have had five gurus, the fifth guru lineage ending with Gautama Buddha.

A Buddha is one who has attained a state of enlightenment. There were prophecies that another Buddha was going to come and that, just as Gautama Buddha taught the concepts of *ahimsa*, non-violence; compassion and nirvana, he would give the world another concept of compassion and harmonious living. This reference is found in many of the Buddhist texts. This sixth Buddha was Jesus Christ.

Jesus was a renowned world teacher after Buddha, and there have been later additions to support this theory of

Christ being the sixth Buddha. Engraved on a large boulder in Kashmir are five seated Buddhas with a sixth one standing. It is widely believed that the standing figure engraved on the rock is the same as pictures found in other parts of Kashmir. Traditionally it is said to be that of Esu or Christ in the garb of a Buddhist with similar headgear to Buddha: an inverted lotus-shaped cap, and long flowing hair.

It is very difficult to say when Christ was accepted as the sixth Buddha. According to history, when Christ came to the Indian subcontinent he stayed at Puri where he learnt the bhakti and Vaishnava concepts. However, due to the social environment prevalent at that time, he was chased out of Puri when he started becoming vocal about the faults of the Vaishnava brahminical tradition.

He went to Varanasi where he studied the monistic vedantic system, Advaita Vedanta, in which there is no difference between God and the One. In the Vaishnava system, he understood the concept of bhakti: surrender, devotion and faith. In the Advaita Vedanta system, he understood the concept of “I am that I am.”

When he encountered different ideas which were contradictory to his own realizations, he left Varanasi and came to Vikramshila, sixty miles from Munger, which is an ancient Buddhist monastery. In its heyday it was a university with no less than ten thousand students. The teachers were monks. At Vikramshila University he studied the traditions of Buddhism, Vajrayana, and so forth. At that time there was a delegation of wandering Buddhist monks going north to Tibet and he decided to join them. In the chronicles of Vikramshila, there is a reference to Christ as being a brilliant and outstanding student and scholar.

With the delegation he travelled through Ladakh and Nepal into Tibet. The documents of Hemis monastery are of that period. He had an open mind and knowledge of the various existing ‘spiritual’ traditions of the country, and understood how the people thought. He also understood their aspirations and had a global and universal vision. Since

that time, the Buddhist tradition has accepted him as the sixth Buddha.

According to the Buddhists, Jesus was the sixth Buddha, and he will not come again?

The sixth Buddha will not come again.

Would you say that in general Buddhists think the same as you?

Yes. A few schools may say that the sixth Buddha is yet to come, but most schools that exist in Tibet or India, including the Dalai Lama, say that he has come and will not come again.

Most of the western books on this subject say he has still to come. Is this because they cannot accept that the sixth Buddha is Jesus Christ?

They cannot accept it because of the religious pattern that is set in their minds. In the east we do not have that set pattern, because our concept of religion is different.

Why was Christ accepted in India if he taught Christianity?

Christ did not teach Christianity in India. He spoke only on Buddhist principles and tried to correct their faults.

What about the testimonies in the gospels? They do not mention anything about this.

Out of the many gospels written by different people, only four were accepted by the people at the helm of affairs. These were the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They were not about the teachings of Christ, but were attempts to establish a structure, and therefore they were very rigid in their thoughts and ideas.

Religious bias always comes in. If you tell a Buddhist that Christ was the sixth Buddha he will be offended. You need a different mentality to accept this. It would be like me saying that Buddha was Christ. He was not, but it would

seem absurd to Christians and they would not accept it even if it were true.

Jesus did not come east after Vikramshila, he only went north. This happened during the so-called 'lost years'. Therefore, he was actually a Buddha first, before he became the Christ.

Why is God always referred to as 'He' and not 'She'?

This question of 'He' and 'She' is nothing but a big joke. In Vedanta, Samkhya, tantra and yoga the concept of God is an abstract one. As a brief introduction, let us look at the various aspects of God and then address the topic of 'He' or 'She'.

Whether God is one, many, an abstract concept or a definite concept, everyone is in agreement that God represents the three main qualities which govern the laws of the universe. These three qualities can be termed as a triad, whether of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva: creator, sustainer and destroyer, or of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The combination of these three attributes or qualities is synonymous with the states of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence.

From a single entity combining everything comes the tantric concept of duality, the Male and Female, or Shiva and Shakti aspects. In the tantric concept, Shiva means the aspect which has total auspiciousness and harmony. Shakti is the power of that auspiciousness which makes things happen. This pair is given different names in different belief systems. For example, in Vedanta it is *Brahma*, which means the ever-expanding self or evolving consciousness, and *Maya*, which means the veil of illusion or ignorance. In the Samkhya system there is the parallel concept of Purusha and Prakriti. *Purusha* represents total consciousness and *Prakriti* means the one which is manifesting as creation.

If we compare these different philosophies, my understanding is that Shiva, Brahma and Purusha can be related to the Father figure, and Maya, Prakriti and Shakti can be related to the Holy Ghost.

Could we call it consciousness and energy also?

Yes. It is consciousness that can make things happen. Spirit has the movement, the force to act. Of course, this is still a form consciousness; vidya and avidya are consciousness, but I am calling them Maya, Shakti and Prakriti.

The concept of God in any religion or philosophy is of a manifest form. Even the theory that God is going to assess us on Judgement Day and punish us accordingly by saying, “You did right; you did wrong. You go to heaven; you go to hell”, gives him the status of a judge. This manifest form is known as *puru* and from this the word ‘Purusha’ is derived. The word *puri* means citadel, town, body, form, figure, shape or dimension. The suffix *sha* refers to the one who resides within it. We are all purushas of the ashram; we are all residing in the ashram.

Purusha of the body is the energy which is manifesting in the body. Even in Christianity, the concept of God is of a purusha, having a form. It is not an abstract term. In Vedanta, on the other hand, Brahman has no form. I know what Rama looks like. I know what Shiva looks like. I know what other gods and goddesses look like, but I do not know what Brahman looks like.

The same applies in Samkhya. God is also an abstract concept there. Samkhya even goes to the extent of saying that there are many purushas, depending on the context. Therefore, at times, the Samkhya system can become very complex.

The tantric system differs in that their theory is not abstract; it is confined to Shiva and Shakti having a form. They are the manifest aspects of that divine quality which is *ajanma*, without birth. Therefore, Shiva is also considered to be *ajanma*, the unborn one. There have been many incarnations of Vishnu, Rama, Krishna and other avatars from birth to death. Even Brahma has had avatars. However, Shiva has never been associated with any avatars. You will not find a childhood image of Shiva either. You will see many images of Rama and Krishna as children, but never of Shiva.

Tantrics have tried to define Shiva as the unborn, unchanging, auspicious reality governing all the principles of the universe in their most elementary form. Why did he live in a graveyard and not in a palace? In a graveyard one is more in touch with the reality of life, which is death. Death is the reality of life. Why is he wearing ash? Why not golden ornaments? Ash represents the transformation of the manifest tattwas into their original form. Whatever the tattwa is, once it is consumed, nothing remains but ash.

Even though we have a physical image of Shiva, the concept of him is of a continuous reality; and although Shakti has a form, she is also the concept of the cosmic or universal Mother.

A beautiful word is used in tantric philosophy: *ardhanarishvara*, the image in which both male and female principles are combined. It is the final state of Shivahood. That aspect is known as *sarvaishwara*, meaning ‘everything is God’; there is no male or female, just God. Lord is a masculine term, but in Sanskrit the word *Ishwara* can be used as a masculine or feminine term, meaning the unchanging reality, the unchanging principle.

The tantrics have viewed the God concept in the form of a mother rather than a father. For them the whole of creation is in the form of a yoni or triangle. In this triangle, the gross, the subtle and the causal manifestation, the reversal, everything is contained. That is why there are representations of triangles in the yantras, because the whole world is the creation of the Holy Mother. If it were not for her we would not be here.

Tantra is the only approach which considers God in the form of the Mother, superficially speaking, because deep inside they are both one: the *sarvaishwara* or *ardhanarishvara* image. Creation takes place from the side of the Mother, the *nari* or female aspect.

When the conscious process has to realize that there is no distinction between this consciousness and that consciousness, then the male component, *saha*, comes in to

play. *Saha* means 'he'. It is realization of consciousness, not of energy. Energy is the Shakti aspect. The realization that "I am not different from that" is the Shiva aspect. From that angle, God becomes a He: "I am Shiva." Even in kundalini yoga, Shakti is in the form of kundalini, in a remote corner of mooladhara, while Shiva sits alone in sahasrara.

It is only a matter of conscious realization that "I am Shiva." Why do we say, "I am Shiva"? It is because we are here with Shakti. Both you and Shakti are together in the manifest dimension. Even Shakti is saying, "I am Shiva." Shakti also has the same inclination to unite with Shiva, to become ardhhanarishvara. The *jiva* or individual soul also proclaims, "I am Shiva!"

It is like father, mother and son living together in a house. Mother and son go out to the market, mooladhara. The house in which the father is sitting is sahasrara. On the way back, the boy says, "I want to go to my father." The Mother says, "Come, let us go to your father." What is the difference? It is just a matter of realizing that, "I have to go where Shiva is sitting." From that angle, the concept of God, the stage which we have to achieve, is the male figure, because we are Shakti.

How do we compare Shiva and Shakti with ida and pingala?

Shiva is in sahasrara, Shakti is in mooladhara. Shiva represents consciousness, Shakti represents energy. Pingala, which is the male energy, represents the active force. Ida, which is the female energy, represents the mental force. Why this switch? The answer is quite simple. Shiva and Shakti are abstract concepts of consciousness and subtle energy, whereas ida and pingala are one step down in the pranic dimension.

The mental energy which is controlled by ida, or the lunar force, is an attribute of energy which is subtle in nature, responsible for the movement of mind. Another name for this energy is chitta shakti. The pingala aspect on the other

hand represents dynamism or vitality, which is manifested in the physical dimension.

Let us look at it from another angle. Shiva is sitting in sahasrara representing pure consciousness. Shakti is in mooladhara, the earth element, representing pure energy manifest in the different levels of the tattwas. The evolution here has been a tattwic one, from pure consciousness to intuitive mind, to space or ether, air, fire, water and finally earth.

Ida and pingala represent the pranic function of kundalini which is at rest in mooladhara. They are known as the two channels or nadis. Pingala represents the dynamic principle, the male aspect or pure energy. Ida represents the passive aspect, the lunar or mental energy. These two attributes belong to kundalini interacting with the world of the senses via the agencies of annamaya, pranamaya, manomaya and other koshas. Ida and pingala connect these koshas together. They connect the six realms of experience of the chakras.

In order to understand this theory you have to appreciate the meaning of mooladhara. Mooladhara is very powerful and is the most important centre in our life. It is the only centre which has the option to remain firmly grounded as the element earth, or launch itself in another direction, from the manifest directly into the unmanifest. Kundalini does not rest in swadhisthana or manipura or anahata; the final place is mooladhara and it is the most powerful centre.

Just as sahasrara is the power centre of Shiva, mooladhara is the power centre of Shakti. The roles of Shakti are two-fold: to control the expressions of Shiva manifesting in the form of the mind as consciousness, and to control the forces of the chakras and tattwas in the form of raw energy or dynamic force. In the first context, Shakti reverses the role. In order to nurture the manifestation of Shiva in the form of consciousness, it adopts the passive role, the feminine role of ida; the approach is to go slowly with the mind. However, in order to control and balance its own activities at

different levels of the chakras and tattwas, it has to adopt a more aggressive, masculine approach; that of pingala. Shiva becomes ardhhanarishvara when Shakti reaches sahasrara, as does Shakti. In this respect, Shakti has a double role in the process of creation.

Sri Swamiji used to tell a story about the function and relationship of Shiva and Shakti. A blind person and a lame person want to go to a fair. How do they go? The blind person can walk, but cannot see. The lame person can see, but cannot walk. So, the lame person climbs on the back of the blind person. The lame person is Shiva, who can see everything but cannot move by his own force. Shakti is blind but can carry Shiva, and with his direction she can walk, slow down or run. If Shiva says, "The road is straight, run a hundred miles an hour with no stops along the way", then Shakti will do so. If Shiva says, "Watch out, there is a big rock in the middle of the road", then Shakti will slow down and step over it.

I would like to know why Indian people place such a high value on the Vedas and Sanskrit language, when it is an imported philosophy which came with the Aryan people when they migrated to India.

First of all, I do not believe in these theories that are taught in schools and universities about the migration of people and tribes in ancient times, as I feel they were written by a race which does not have direct knowledge of other races and ancient cultures. There might be some evidence indicating the possibility of that theory, but the contemporary theory which is now taught in schools should not become undebatable history. Common sense says something else.

If the Aryans, as you call them, migrated from some other country there would be references to this ancient country in the Vedas and Upanishads. According to some modern historians the Vedas are supposed to have been written by the Aryans before they came to India. Yet, when you study Ayurveda you will find that it speaks in praise of rivers like Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati and not of some other river

in Central Asia. Since the very beginning, you will find references and prayers to the rivers and mountains that have existed in this part of the world and therefore, we sannyasins who have not been exposed to that educational system feel that the history presented by the western system is lopsided and not properly investigated.

According to the descriptions given in the most ancient literature of the Asians, which is Ayurveda, the entire life revolved around the seven rivers which flow in the Indian subcontinent. Therefore, it makes us believe that the Aryans originated in this region and that they did not migrate from Central Asia or other northern countries. If they lived in some other part of the world they might have sung prayers to the river Danube, for example, or the river Thames.

The planet has tilted a few times and there have been many geological changes. Yet, even during different tilts the equatorial belt always received light and warmth. It was the first geographical region to be exposed to the sun's rays after the Ice Age. These rivers mentioned above flow from the Himalayas into the plains. This means that, logically speaking, water promotes life, especially in a society which depends on agriculture. How can you discover fire when you are covered all your life under a canopy of ice? Would you expect to find a dry twig? No. Life will only grow when there is an abundance of water. That is why we have vegetation, forests, jungles and animals.

If you look at the civilizations which have flourished around the equatorial belt, such as China, Central Asia, Africa and South America, they are very different. There is a great possibility that civilization actually began in these parts of the world and people migrated to other parts of the world, including Europe, at a later stage.

The Indian people are not the descendants of the migrant Aryans; rather, the western civilizations are the descendants of the migrant equatorial people. I do not believe in the theory that people known as Aryans migrated from outside India to this continent.

It takes about one thousand years for a civilization to eventually create a comprehensible language. Today, we have an understandable language with many variations and varieties. Even English varies according to the part of the world in which it is spoken. There are many dialects in one language, but each language has a definite form, and all humans speak one language with different dialects, accents and connotations.

There is always one refined form of a language and the refined form of the language which evolved in this part of the world is Sanskrit, just as in China it is Mandarin. The scripts may vary immensely, for example, there is a big difference between scripts in Hindi and Tamil, but in both we find Sanskrit words. Sanskrit is the mother of all tongues which have been evolving throughout the Indian subcontinent.

It is necessary for sannyasins to know the origins, the original thoughts and concepts which started the quest for spirituality. Therefore, at least for the Indian swamis, there is a great emphasis on learning Sanskrit, so that they are able to know the tradition. If you have that inclination, study it, as then you will be able to understand the source of the spiritual traditions which evolved in this part of the world. Or you can just read translations and not worry about it.

**What is the doctor's role in helping society through yoga?
How can he apply the benefits of yoga to himself and others?**

Doctors take the *sankalpa* or resolution to follow the karma of healing others in pain and suffering to the best of their ability, knowledge and skill. If they can take this sankalpa in earnest then they will become the best mediums to help and serve humanity. At the same time, they should be aware of the obligations, disciplines and training they have to follow in the pursuit of this karmic concept.

Yoga believes that if the human body can make itself ill due to certain imbalances, then it can also correct those imbalances, whether they are cellular, molecular or even muscular, and return to optimum health. The obtaining of

health may take some time, depending on the range over which yoga has to act. Sometimes, helping a person to manage an illness can take years and years. Sometimes, it is a matter of weeks and months, and sometimes only a matter of days.

Once the basic understanding of the patient's requirements is acquired, combining the practices of yoga with the therapeutic sciences which the doctor pursues can be a very effective tool towards a cure. Of course, yoga emphasizes a holistic approach towards life and its management skills. Once you have a holistic approach, then it is easier to actually heal the patient of the disease itself and not only do away with the symptoms.

Most of the modern therapeutic sciences tend to treat the symptoms and not the cause. We treat our headache, but the headache is only a symptom and not the cause. The cause may lie somewhere else, for example in emotional stress, external work or environmental stress that we may feel. The application of a holistic approach in the management of these problems gives an easy and effective way to treat the symptoms as well as the cause. This can be applied to both fields of medicine, physical and mental.

If you have the knowledge of yoga you can also treat the spiritual ailments of your patients, as even in the spirit sickness arises. With the knowledge of the holistic sciences, it is possible to treat spiritual illness and thereby ensure that optimum health is attained. Therefore, increase your personal and practical understanding of yoga, and then you can definitely utilize it for helping a wide spectrum of disease on the physical, mental, psychic and spiritual planes.

In your opinion, what major changes will occur in the twenty-first century? Will technological development reach a dead end, if it has not already?

Technology will continue to develop, and I do not think there will be any end to innovations. It seems that there is no limit to the different forms of life that a person can give through art. From the didgeridoo we have come to the synthesizer.

Who would have thought that from the original concept of music which our forefathers conceived, playing on the hollow bark of a tree, we would now have a small instrument containing a great variety of musical forms, notes, drums, rhythms, speeds and even volume. Look at the Hallmark range of cards; now there is a card for every occasion. Technology is going to continue, there is no doubt about it. Human beings, despite their resistance, will be adapting more and more to modern technology as it becomes more accessible and more acceptable.

However, at the same time, there will be a trend to experience nature, to experience the basic roots and foundations of our life.

Perhaps by the end of the twenty-first century we will all be back in caves. Can you imagine wearing clothes made of tree bark and talking on a cell phone to someone sitting on Mars or Jupiter or Venus? That may be possible, and I think that would be a good society.

**How long will people continue to destroy the environment?
Is there any reason or purpose to this destruction?**

Ask the people who are destroying the environment. The reason or purpose is known to those who are doing the job, and the other people are just silent spectators, accepting what is happening.

We have to look at the situation from two angles. First is the physical aspect in which the environment is facing great changes and many of its qualities are being destroyed. That is the external factor. It is like living in a house and taking it apart piece by piece from the inside, for whatever purpose you may have in mind, and in the course of time finding that you do not have a house. That is what people are doing to themselves, dismantling their own house. After some thousands of years we will suddenly find that we no longer have anywhere to live. The earth will be polluted, depleted of its resources and we shall begin our search in some other place, and then destroy that place and search for another. That seems to be the trend.

There is a second aspect, however, which is that nature is a living entity; the planet and the environment are a living force. Maybe they are not living in the sense that we know life to be, but there is an intelligence which is being affected. This living force is also capable of resurrecting or regenerating itself. Once the process of regeneration begins, humanity will be wiped out because the whole planet will begin to redress itself.

This concept of the planet regenerating itself is not new. In the vedic civilization it has been said that the planet goes through phases where the resources are misused and a great imbalance occurs in the structure of *prakriti* or nature. This planet is nothing but a manifestation of *prakriti*, and when an imbalance is created in nature it will make the necessary arrangements and adjustments to rejuvenate itself. This has happened many times. Different names have been given to these kinds of resuscitations. Some call it *pralaya*, some call it change of *kalpas*. Whenever that change occurs, it takes a long time for humanity to become strong again, to reach a point where it can begin to alter the environment. It can take thousands of years, or even a million years. This idea seems very definite, clear and full of conviction.

Just consider your own body. If you get a rash on your body, what do you do? If you get a pimple, a cut or a scratch on your body, what do you do? You try to heal it; however, your efforts are external. If the body itself does not heal then whatever the external effort nothing will happen. If the cells do not heal themselves then a cut will be a cut for eternity! The body has to heal itself. There are organisms, different forms of life within the body, cellular life, molecular life, which go to the affected part and become active.

Our body itself is like a planet, and in the same way the planet itself is a living body. When tumours created by humans begin to grow in the body of the planet, then the planet has to use drastic and sharp measures to heal itself. Let us hope and let us work for one aim: to maintain our body and our house in good health. This is the message which you can give to other people.

Step by Step

We have to understand the yogic and sannyasa lifestyle in a different light, where the whole process becomes one of sadhana and not one of getting a diploma or certificate. It is with that attitude and approach in mind that I have selected some people for one kind of sannyasa and some for another kind, regardless of what they wanted. If we have to depend on what we want, then we always wish for the moon, the furthest thing away.

Frankly speaking, many of those people who took karma sannyasa previously did not have a proper base. Sri Swamiji had a reason for giving so many people different forms of initiation and karma sannyasa. That was because he had the energy to move people on psychic levels from one thing to the next. I do not have that ability. It is my wish that those people who want to adopt the yogic and sannyasa lifestyle should try to develop the necessary mentality, attitude and qualities, which are progressive in nature, and not those which create a stagnant personality.

For the majority of aspirants, karma sannyasa initiation will become a stagnant area, psychically, emotionally, mentally and in many other ways. By giving jignasu sannyasa I am working on two levels. First, keeping the drive active in you. You know very well that jignasu is only the beginning and you have to go to the next stage, so you will try to fulfil the conditions of jignasu sannyasa sooner than expected in order to move on.

Second, the jignasu sadhana will provide the basis for further and future spiritual growth. There have been some people who have shown a different type of personality from the very beginning of the course. They have displayed more than average seriousness and sincerity. Those are the people whom I have selected for karma sannyasa. You should not mind if you are being given jignasu sannyasa when you asked for karma sannyasa, as the concept of sannyasa is not yet clear to all of you.

During the course I have never spoken about sannyasa, mainly for the reason that we first need to have a structure of discipline, and this yogic discipline should be ingrained in our personality. It should not be something which is imposed from outside; it should be something which is deeply embedded. If we feel that something is being imposed on us, then we will have the tendency to leave it after some time. I am sure that all of you are aware and sincere enough to understand this.

A change has to come from deep within, and not from a mere external wearing of clothes. Only then can real spirituality be understood. I want all of you to understand that real thing, not just an imposed discipline in regard to sannyasa or the yogic lifestyle. I want all of you to have a proper direction and spontaneous vision in your own life. In order to have that, it has to be done slowly, step by step. You can choose boyfriends, girlfriends, restaurants to eat in, and all the things in life that you can enjoy, but there is no choice in spiritual life or in sannyasa, but to go slowly, step by step.

There is a story about a person standing at the bottom of a mountain and a person standing at the top of the mountain. The person at the bottom yells to the one above, "I want to come up. Which way should I come?" This is where we are at. We are at one stage of life and we want to go to the next stage, and we say "How do I do it?" The person at the top replies, "There is a footpath. Come up along the footpath." The person below asks, "Is there no other direct

way, because the footpath goes in a roundabout zigzag way?" The person above replies, "There is a direct way. You just come straight up." The person at the bottom says, "But if I come straight up I am going to cut myself in many places. There are thorns and rocks. Tell me of an easier way." The person above replies, "All right, you walk up half the way and I will come down half the way!"

This kind of adjustment, "You walk half the way and I walk half the way", can happen in normal day-to-day circumstances, but it should not happen on the spiritual path. Things have to be taken step by step, and each successive step has to be perfected before the next is taken. This is what you have to keep in mind.



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Notes

Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

On the Wings of the Swan series consists of discourses and satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati during the eighties and nineties.

These early teachings, presented in their original question and answer format, contain a wealth of wisdom applicable to all yogic aspirants seeking guidance and inspiration for living a harmonious life. A yogi from birth, Swami Niranjan's approach combines practicality, empathy, compassion, warmth, humour and penetrating insight. No matter what the question, Swami Niranjan lends it an ease unique to him, bringing together an ancient spiritual tradition and an understanding of the current way of life. With each answer, he takes us right into the heart of the matter and provides a fresh perspective on it.

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